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# Adventure

Talbot Mundy
Alan LeMay
T. S. Stribling
Arthur O. Friel
Bill Adams
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# Contents for October 10th, 1925, Issue

**Admiral of Caesar's Fleet** *A Complete Novel* . . . . Talbot Mundy 3
Early Britain—*Tros* launches his great ship.

**The Ensign** *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . Bill Adams 74
Sea—it was a weary way to Falmouth.

**The Legacy Mule** . . . . . Alan LeMay 89
West—a beastly heritage.

**La Capitane*** . . . . . Claude Farrère 99
Pirate Waters—the outlaw vessel fought hard.

**The Spook** . . . . . Arthur O. Friel 103
Mountains—it had unearthly habits.

**The Wreckers** *Old Customs* . . . . . Leonard H. Nason 112

**The Jinx of the Warlock** . . . . . Fairfax Downey 113
Civil War—a blockade runner needs silence.

**Redemont** *A Three-Part Story Part II* . . . . . H. Bedford-Jones 122
France, 1707—what hidden lore was known to the Mole?

**Slants on Life** *The Passing Train* . . . . . Bill Adams 157

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

**(Continued on next page)**

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*(Continued from preceding page)*

**The Law of the Cossack** . . . . . **Kenneth Malcolm Murray** 158
Russia—*Bohdan* swept all before him.

**The Refugees** *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **T. S. Stribling** 162
Curaçao—the dictator was in full flight.

**The Camp-Fire** A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers . . . . . 181

**Old Songs That Men Have Sung** . . . . . 185

**Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader** . . . . . 185

**Ask Adventure** . . . . . 186
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

**Lost Trails** . . . . . 191

**The Trail Ahead** . . . . . 192

**Headings** . . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

**Cover Design** . . . . . **G. C. Delano**

## One New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

LIFE was a precarious gamble to the grim pioneer who sought his hearth on the lawless borders of Kentucky in that era of epic chaos preceding the War of 1812. To *Jeffry Lang* fate bequeathed the added heritage of a momentous duty. "THE BORDER BREED," a five-part story by Hugh Pendexter, will commence in the next issue.

WHEN Corporal Zsbyski descended from the air upon the frozen Doukhobors there was only one thing for them to believe. Especially when the prophecies were what they were. "ST. GABRIEL ZSBYSKI" is a complete novelette, by William Byron Mowery, in the next issue.

THE Spanish lieutenant preferred feeding a native to ants to granting clemency. But even a Spanish lieutenant can not always have his own way. "THIRTEEN MEN AND A COCK-EYED MATE," a complete novelette by Charles Victor Fischer, is in the next issue.

WHEN a wildcat oil well comes in on new territory, the parasites of the oil fields are standing by to grab the profits of other men's toil by any means in their power. To an owner of such a well an airplane may prove either a help or a menace. "THE OILY BIRD," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, will appear in the next issue.



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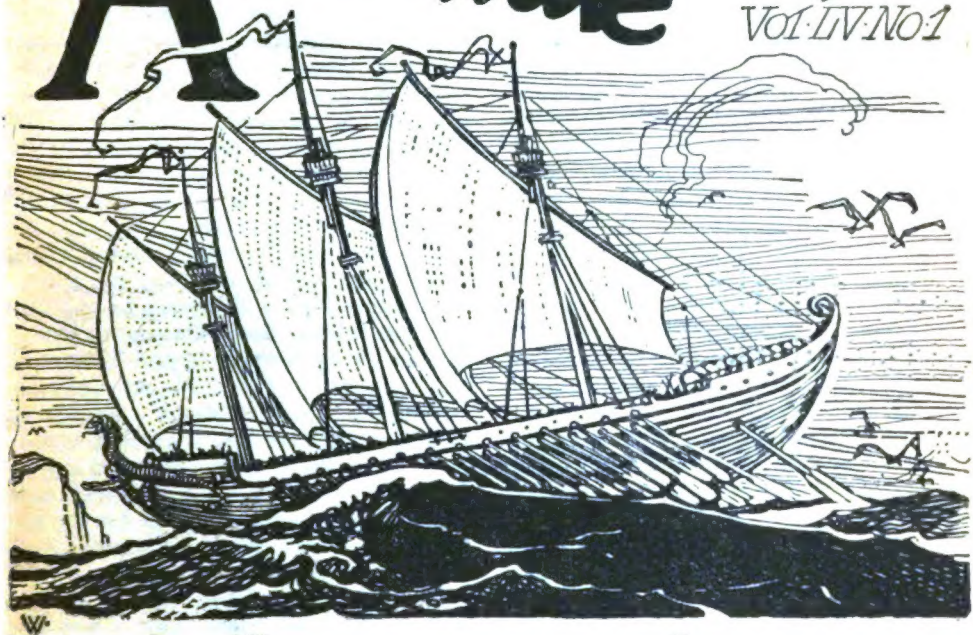

# ADMIRAL of CAESAR'S FLEET

## A Complete Novel

By Talbot Mundy

*Author of "Tros of Samothrace," "The Enemy of Rome," etc.*

### CHAPTER ONE

BRITAIN. B.C. 54.

THERE were ambassadors from half-a-dozen kings around the fireplace in the great hall in Caswallon's house, and they were dressed in all their finery of jewelled woolen cloth, with golden chains around their necks. Behind them, backs against the long wall, their retainers sat, arms folded —a pattern in half-relief against the shadow that reached to right and left of the door into the gloom of the far-away corners.

Firelight shook the shadows among the ceiling beams and fitfully illuminated shields and weapons, colored designs on the wall-cloth, faces, shapes of a dozen dogs asleep. Oil sconces by an inner door at one end of the hall and two more on the wall that faced it, made halos of light in the smoke from the hearth. A minstrel with a small harp plucked at the strings reflectively, as if searching for music to appeal to many minds in disagreement.

From the vestibule, through the thickness of an oaken door, came thumps of spear-butts and the laughter of men-at-arms, but within the great hall there was hardly any conversation. A man's voice broke too noticeably on the silence for even a king's ambassador to care to voice more than platitudes.

But in a smaller room, by another fireside,

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there was conference that those ambassadors would have given ears to hear. Tros, shaking the black hair from his bull neck with gestures that made the firelight gleam along the angle of his jaw, heavy black brows low over his amber eyes, sat, fist on table, clutching a roll of parchment. Beside him, his lieutenant, Sigurdsen, the Northman sat, saying little but observing much—long-boned, fair-complexioned, red-haired, bearded and possessed of shoulders that suggested the swing of a battle-ax.

Fflur faced them, hair in long braids to her waist, her gray eyes watching Tros as if he were the arbiter of destiny. She was the mother of three sons, of whom one had been old enough to fight in his own chariot against the Romans on the Kentish beach less than a year ago. Yet, except for a maturity about the eyes, she looked young—younger than her husband, who was actually younger than herself. He, Caswallon, king of the Trinobantes, beside her, tugged at his fair mustache, his white skin whiter for the pale-blue figures drawn with fading woad on neck and forearms.

Tros' Greek retainer Conops, one-eyed, skirted, with a slit lip that displayed an eye-tooth, a long knife in a red sash at his waist, sat on the floor, cross-legged, poking at the fire—a small man built with the strong ungainliness of an embattled bob-cat.

Orwic, Caswallon's nephew and right-hand counsellor, handsome as a statue of Apollo, as irreverent as the wind, best horseman, boldest blade and most wooed bachelor in Britain, lolled at the end of the table, his interest disguised under an air of cultivated boredom.

The room was so hung with colored draperies as almost to resemble an enormous tent. The door was double-curtained, leather behind embroidered cloth. No sound of what they said could reach the great hall, though they had argued noisily.

"The breadth and length of it is this," Caswallon said at the end of three hours' hot debate, gripping the edge of the table with a great white hand. "We beat the Romans once. I helped the Cantii because they pay me tribute, but none of my cousin kings * lent aid. They said it was our affair. Then, Tros, I lent you a hundred men to go to Gaul and rescue your father. You succeeded, but it irritated Cæsar. He sent ambassadors and spies to pave the way for a new invasion. The spies won the ears of these lousy kings, who stirred up the Druids against me. Some accused me of ambition to be king of all Britain; others, of cooking an unnecessary war against the Romans. And two of the fools accused me of too great friendship for Cæsar. What was the fact? As we in this room know, Cæsar's ambassadors did offer me his friendship along with a promise to make me the ruler of all Britain, and I rejected the proposal. Mother of my sons, don't interrupt me! Let us have this stated clearly, so that we may discuss it less at random.

The great Lord Druid Taliesan summoned us to conference at Verulam, and only the Gods know what will happen to us all now Taliesan is dead. He had wisdom. Taliesan died at the conference—grand Taliesan the peace-maker! And ere the breath had left his lips we learned that Rome's ambassadors had played the dirtiest trick that ever dishonored Cæsar's name—snatched my wife Fflur when my back was turned and carried her away to Gaul as hostage for my good behavior! Peace, Fflur! I speak. I say, don't interrupt me!

"And along with Fflur they seized Helma, wife of my good friend Tros. And when Tros and I took ship to Gaul to win our wives back, they slew Helma, she trying to escape and get word to us. But we caught Cæsar and obliged him to exchange himself for Fflur or die. So here sits Fflur beside me, and I have Tros to thank for it."

"Tros and the luck o' Ludd!" said Orwic.

"Tros and the gods and the sorcerer Eough," said Fflur, "but I think my Lord Caswallon did his share."

"Mother of my sons, I would have died for you nine times over like a cat away from home, and have found a tenth life in which to regret you, had I failed! But listen to me! Cæsar had no liking to be taken prisoner, though he thought it a great stroke of strategy to sneak my wife away. He feels his dignity is injured. He swore vengeance, pledging himself to invade us with an army and to burn my house. It is war. There is no gainsaying it. Cæsar will come."

"Not if I have my way, he won't," said Orwic, yawning. "If half what Tros tells us about the man is true, we need only to send him a woman. She can put poison in his drink or run a bodkin through his heart or—"

* Not necessarily relatives. The word cousin here signifies equals, neighbors, men with similar responsibilities.

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FFLUR interrupted in a voice as vibrant as her father's, who was Mygnach the Dwarf. And they said of him that he could ring bells merely by speaking at them.

"If I thought you meant that, Orwic, I would forbid you the house!"

"Nay, nay, I can't spare Orwic," said Caswallon. "Let him talk as he pleases, so be he plays the man in action. Cæsar will come with any army—"

"He will not come yet. Not before summer," Tros put in. "He will need time to prepare his army and to pin the Gauls down tight before he leaves them in his rear."

"Worse and worse!" remarked Caswallon. "If he came before the indignation dies, my men would fight. I might even persuade these craven cousin-kings to lend me ten or fifteen thousand men. But already the kings send word by their envoys that this quarrel with Cæsar is of my making, so I must pay for their help if I need it. And if Cæsar waits a few months, my men will be saying the same thing. Ludd! Ludd! Ludd's blood!" he exclaimed. "This kinging it is a man's task, but there is small reward in it!"

"We talk, we talk," groaned Orwic. "What are we going to do?"

"I build a ship!" said Tros, and struck the table with his parchment.

Fflur nodded, her eyes on Tros as if she could see the thought behind his massive forehead. The amber of her ornaments was not more yellow than his eyes. The gray of her eyes suggested no more strength of will than did the line of his jaw, neck, mouth and shoulders. She was Athena to his Poseidon, she quietly wise, he capable of tempests before which cliffs would shatter.

"In the ship, Tros, you will sail away. And then what?" she asked him.

"Sigurdsen knows," he answered, "and Conops knows. Now I will tell you and I think you will not laugh, although my friend Caswallon will believe me mad and Orwic will mock me at risk of being sat on hot coals on the hearth! The world is round, and I will sail around it!"

Again Fflur nodded.

"You know too much, Tros," she said quietly. "And still too little for your own good."

"Tros knows enough to stand like a true man by his friends," said Orwic. "Mad? I like that kind of madman. The world has my permission to be square if it so pleases, and Tros, if he wishes, may call it a triangle. Nonetheless, I sail with him on his adventure."

"Not you!" Tros retorted. "I need men who are obedient."

"Kill me in single combat, or prepare my quarters in the ship!" said Orwic blandly.

Caswallon's face fell, for he loved Tros like a brother. More than that, he counted on his knowledge of the Romans and his passion to wreck Cæsar's schemes of conquest. But he knew Tros too well to try to set obstructions in his way, and he knew there was no holding Orwic.

"How soon will the ship be finished?" he asked, trying to mask his disappointment.

"Soon, and for many reasons. A ship's genius is motion," Tros replied. "She will rot if she sits still too long—on land or water. My genius, too, consists in action. I am no use at this waiting game. I lose my temper if a dozen popinjays of kinglets strut and claw like poultry clucking for grain that is still in the sack. I would knock those envoys' heads together and send their masters a challenge to provide regiments against Cæsar or against me, whichever suits their temper best! That might not be the best course. You can manage your poultry-yard better without me. Nevertheless, you are my friend. I will serve you first and take what comes of it. But I must serve you in my own way, and I must have more men."

Again he rapped the parchment on the table. He seemed to wish to call attention to it, but the sight of it suggested no solution of the problem to Caswallon's worried brain.

"You forget I am an admiral of Cæsar's fleet?"

Caswallon stared and Orwic laughed. Sigurdsen grumbled below his breath, being superstitious about writings in a language he could not read. Fflur leaned back, drumming jeweled fingers on the table.

"Much good a writing will do! There is no seal on it," said Orwic. "Cæsar will have sent long ago to all the ports to warn them that parchment is a forgery and—"

There was a small wooden box on the table. Tros struck it with the roll of parchment.

"Perhaps—and let us hope—that Cæsar forgets, as you forget, that when I took his

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bireme, there was not only his treasure in the well below the cabin, but his seal and a great stack of his private documents. There lies the seal." He struck the box again. "A fool maybe I am, but no such fool as Cæsar thinks. He smiled when we had him prisoner. He thought he could bribe me, and he knew we would never kill him, for fear his own men would kill Fflur. He offered to make me admiral of his fleet if I would desert Caswallon. And he smiled again when I made him write me the appointment.

"Cæsar was fool enough to think me fool enough to believe that appointment valid without the seal. But I have the seal! He thought me fool enough to believe that he will not close all the ports of Gaul against me and set a big price on my head. He forgot, or else he never knew, that I have his private correspondence, that I know who his friends are in Rome, and who are his enemies. The thought never entered the calculating brain of Cæsar, that I will go to Rome and there, it may be, break the wheels of his ambition!"

"Rome?" Fflur muttered. "Rome!"

She seemed to be seeing visions.

"If he has any brains at all, he will have written to Rome," said Orwic.

"Not about me! Not Cæsar! I know him. He will count on catching me up to some trick on the coast of Gaul, or possibly in Spain, at any rate this side of the Gates of Hercules.* In the first place, Cæsar's popularity in Rome depends entirely on his personal renown. If it were known he had been taken prisoner and forced to exchange himself for a British chief's wife, whom he had stolen against all the laws of embassy, there is a man named Cato in Rome who would leap at the opportunity to denounce him before the Senate. Moreover, by appointing me an admiral Cæsar usurped the Senate's privilege. He is on the horns of a dilemma. If he will keep the story secret of his having stolen a king's wife by dishonorable trickery and of having returned her in exchange for himself and an appointment that he had no right to make, he must keep silence and watch for me as cats watch mouse-holes. He knows I build a ship, but he does not know how big a ship or how sea-worthy, because Caswallon slew his spies. It will never enter Cæsar's head that I will go swiftly to Rome."

* The modern Straits of Gibraltar.

"Rome!" Fflur said again, She sat up straight and stared at him.

"Aye, Rome! Where Cæsar's masters are and Cæsar's enemies. Where the moneylenders live, Crassus, greatest of them all. Where Pompey, Cæsar's friend in name, broods jealousy against him. Rome, where Cato lives, who hates usurpers, and would rather break a spoke of Cæsar's wheel than eat his dinner. I will sail through the Gates of Hercules, drop anchor in the port of Ostia, proceed to Rome and do there what I can to ruin Cæsar's prospect of invading Britain. If I were you—" Tros leaned forward, elbow on the table, pointing with the parchment at Caswallon. — "I would tell those kings' ambassadors to go home. I would bid them say to their masters that you prefer to try to save all Britain without their aid, since they ask to be paid to save themselves. That should set them thinking. It should make them more ashamed than if you pleaded. Then, if my mission fails and Cæsar invades Britain later in the year in spite of me, you will be no worse off than you are now, and perhaps they will offer assistance instead of asking to be bought."

Caswallon shook his head.

"They would plan to weaken me," he said, "by waiting until I take the brunt of the invasion. Later, if Cæsar should have too much the best of it, they would probably send men. But those same men would force me to pay the bill when they had driven Cæsar out of Britain. I would very likely have to abdicate."

"Cross that river when you reach it," Tros suggested. "You gain nothing by promising payment now. You will only whet the edge of their cupidity. The high hand in a bargain is the hand that wins, and the gods love him who plays the man. Be daring!"

FFLUR leaned back again, her eyes half-closed, her fingers again drumming on the table.

"You—you would dare anything."

"Except to take me with him!" Orwic interrupted. "But he shall! I enjoy Tros. He reminds me of the northeast wind."

"But we," Fflur went on, "we have two whole tribes to think of. Caswallon is king of the Trinobantes, and the Cantii pay him tribute. It is they who will suffer unless

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we can form an alliance with other tribes against Cæsar."

"Suffer!" Tros struck the table with his fist. "Show me freedom that must not be fought for! Make you ready for the fight and let those kings' ambassadors go home with good proud answers for their kings, who then may find some manhood in themselves before the war begins! They come here to eat and drink your provender, demanding tribute from your purse, when they ought to be offering money and men. If they go home and raise no regiments, and if you raise all you can, and if I throw a stick in Cæsar's wheel so that he can't invade you, then, I think those cousin-kings of yours may have to learn who kings it over them in Britain!

"If Cæsar were to beat you he would trample on them, too, wouldn't he? If Cæsar were only to weaken you, you say they would rub it in by taxing you for whatever scraps of aid they might have brought in the nick of time. Well and good. If Cæsar doesn't come, but if you have made ready for him, you will be strong. I am no advocate of conquests. I abominate them. But I believe in making my debtor pay whatever bill he owes. If I were in your shoes when that day comes, I would make those cousin-kings pay through the nose for having saved them all from Cæsar! There would be no taxes for a while in my domain, but such heavy ones in theirs as should keep them from growing bumptious!"

Fflur smiled and shook her head.

"Caswallon is too easy-going. He is more likely to send them help in famine-time than to remember grudges."

She was not looking at her husband, and when he crashed his great fist on the table she turned her head away to hide a smile.

"Mother of my sons!" he exploded. "How often must I tell you that a king in Britain has to steer his course with two-score councilors pulling him this and that way! The only man of all my council whom I can trust always to vote with me is Orwic. And now Orwic says he sails with Tros! Can't you, won't you see, that if I give these ambassadors a manly answer, my own council will accuse me of hot-headedness and will oppose whatever next I want to do?"

"I see that Tros is right," Fflur answered. "And you can get along very well without Orwic."

Orwic came out of his ostentatious boredom long enough to look surprized.

"Orwic only irritates the council by supporting you whether you are right or wrong, and by being too young to have any right to your confidence. If Orwic goes, there will be rivalry to win your favor and you can swing the council any way you please."

"I see my end! I surely go with Tros," said Orwic, hiding chagrin beneath a mask of mannerly good humor. "No more sitting all day long between fat landholders and listening to speeches that would send a weasel to sleep! No more all-night sittings to decide whether girls without doweries are lawful seizin, or who shall pay for the bridge on Durwhern* road! I visit Rome with Tros. Then what will happen, Tros, if you're wrong and the world turns out to be triangular? When we reach one of the corners, and suppose it sticks up in the air, like that, will the ship go tumbling down the other side, or, suppose there isn't any water, what then?"

Caswallon interrupted gloomily—

"I must summon the council—"

"To hear my resignation?" Orwic asked, amused at his own conceit.

"— before I can safely answer these ambassadors. Tros, brother Tros, I think you had better speak before the council. They will resent the intrusion, but it is just possible you might convince them. I know I can't. They wouldn't even vote me an army when Cæsar's men stole Fflur. They offered money for Fflur's ransom. They will offer money now, with which to buy protection against Cæsar from a company of kings, who will make the weather an excuse for breaking bargains when the time comes! Will you speak to them?"

Tros nodded. Fflur drew in her breath.

"I will be there!" remarked Orwic. "You could no more sleep through a speech by Tros than you could after a dose of druids' physic! Why not let Tros talk, too, to those ambassadors in the big hall? I would love to listen!"

"If we are not careful," said Fflur, "the council will want to inquire into Tros' shipbuilding. There has been trouble already because he has used so many blacksmiths, and has raised the price of food in Lunden by employing so many men in one place. They will want to tax his ship, and they will ask what is to become of all the blacksmiths

* The modern Canterbury.

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when the ship is finished. Moreover, when you and Tros came to rescue me in Gaul, you brought more than a hundred charcoal-burners with you, and they never returned.*

"The council blame Tros for the charcoal shortage. They are afraid to go to Tros' shipyard and make trouble there, because of the burning stinkballs that Eough the sorcerer taught him how to make. But if Tros appears before the council, with too much strong advice, some one is sure to accuse him of sorcery and of trouble making and intrigue and what-not else."

"They accuse him already!" Caswallon laughed. "But they can't get away from the fact that Taliesan favored him, and that it was Tros who wrecked Cæsar's fleet when Cæsar invaded Kent."

"The Druids have lost influence since Taliesan died," Fflur answered. "Men are saying Taliesan was the last who knew the Mysteries, and that now the whole company of Druids is like sheep without a shepherd. As for Cæsar's fleet, there are plenty who say it was not Tros at all but the wind that destroyed it. Several women have told me that their husbands are saying Tros lied."

Caswallon sat bolt upright.

"Which women? Whose husbands?" he demanded. "I will deal with those husbands! I will wager they are men who skulked in bed while the rest of us were fighting Romans on the beach! Let me think now. Was one of them—"

"No names!" said Fflur. "The women will tell me nothing more if I betray their confidences. But I think it will be best if Tros keeps away from the council. Let him finish his ship and sail away and do what he can for us in Rome, leaving us to manage this corner of Britain."

Tros offered no demurrer. He had faith in Fflur's intuition, even though she had not foreseen that Cæsar's messengers would take her prisoner; even though she had not prevented his own wife Helma from trying to escape and so being shot by the Roman guards. He knew that intuition works by fits and starts. And besides, she proposed what he wanted to do, which was argument enough.

"I will finish my ship," he answered. "Fflur is right. I will attend to my own business. Purge you those ambassadors and manage your council how you can. Is supper late, or is my belly out of time from too much talking?"

Fflur leaned back again and studied him from under lowered eyelids.

"Out of time, I think," she said at last. "Taliesan used to say, the proper time at which to do things is as important as the things we do. I think you will not see Rome until—"

"Until I have a crew!" Tros interrupted. "Men! I need men!"

"Patience! You need patience, until the right time," Fflur said quietly.

## CHAPTER II

### GATHERING CLOUDS

SOON—Tros had promised himself. But it was early spring, and the Britons had a thousand activities that they preferred to hauling choice oak lumber for him or to letting their wives weave sail-cloth and twist cordage. While winter lasted they were satisfied to have a ready market for almost anything they cared to sell in the way of labor, material or provender. But as soon as the snow melted and the warm wind brought rain that made the tree-buds swell, they began to think of farms, the breeding of cattle and horses and, not least, the surging in their own veins that made any kind of steady work for some one else unthinkable. So difficulties dogged the heels of unforeseen delay.

Tros' ship, with the ribs of Cæsar's broken and dismantled bireme on the mud beside her, still rested in her cradle on the ways, her underbody gleaming like a mirror when the sun shone. Tros had coated her with tin, an innovation daring as it was original, and an extravagance that irritated Britons almost as much as his capture of a whole ship-load of the expensive metal had exasperated Cæsar. True, the British owners of the tin received their purchase price, because Cæsar had had to pay it against a document that bore his own signature; but if Tros had plated the whole ship with gold he could have hardly created more jealousy and adverse comment. Tin was wealth, the one sure article of commerce that the Britons always could exchange for foreign goods, the stuff in which ransoms were paid. Ingots of it, shaped like knuckle bones, were easier to trade than minted money.

* "Hostages to Luck," in the August 20th issue of *Adventure*.

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It was no use Tros explaining that a smooth, unweeded surface would increase the ship's speed, and that speed meant safety. They bade him stay on land and use the tin for making bronze shields, wheels and weapons; or to buy a farm with half of it and store the rest against an evil day. In vain he showed them pier-piles that had been exposed to tide-water. They retorted that if his ship grew rotten he could build a new one, whereas tin was almost priceless and much harder to obtain than lumber.

Caswallon's council, angry with the king because on Tros' advice he had returned a stiff-necked answer to those other kings' ambassadors, now fanned the flame of irritation by questioning the advisability of permitting Tros to finish a ship that he would certainly use against Cæsar, thus providing the Romans with additional excuse for an invasion. Had they not lost enough young men already on the Kentish beach? Was it respectful to the gods or sane men's policy to increase the already serious risk of war?

There were some who said that the gods, and Ludd particularly, on the bosom of whose River Thames the great ship would be launched, would certainly resent the barbarous impiety of wasting honest tin below the water level. Floods might follow. Usually pestilence came in the wake of flood. A prevalence of northeast winds might bring successive raids of Northmen. There were a hundred likely ways in which the gods might wreak a vengeance; and there was no longer any Taliesan to whom to go for spiritual succor.

In the end they appealed to the Druids, on whom the majority still felt they might depend for light on their perplexity. But the Druids had lost their own faith in themselves with astonishing suddenness since Taliesan's great soul departed for another world. They returned evasive answers, of which any man might make his own interpretation, thus increasing doubt without condemning Tros nor yet supporting him.

They hinted that he cut down far too many oak trees, on which grew the sacred mistletoe, and they made guarded remarks about his misuse of the sacred yew to form springs for his long-range arrow engines, but they declined to interfere in matters that concerned the king and council rather than themselves, since, said they, no emergency existed.

The usual gossipers grew busy. The men who, in all ages and in any land, seek always to destroy and to prevent by innuendo without risking their own skins, stirred indignation in the minds of ignorant men who knew nothing of church or state but were easily flattered and easily persuaded that the fate of Britain rested in their hands. There were riots outside the shipyard. Men came by night to set fire to the ship, to the lumber piles, the forge and workshops. Tros had to disperse the mob three times in one week by burning quantities of the stenching chemical that Eough the alchemist, the sorcerer, as Britons called him, had taught him how to make. The spluttering stench saved ship and buildings, and after the third demonstration of the stuff's effectiveness there was no more open violence; but the charge of sorcery against Tros became as easy to lay as it was difficult to disprove.

Sorcery meant excommunication by the Druids first, and then impeachment before king and council if any one could be found with courage to take the first step along with the responsibility. Conviction would be tantamount to outlawry, since any man might slay such an offender without risk of punishment.

None did come forward to insist on an impeachment, because of the law that allowed revenge to the accused in the event that he should win a favorable verdict, and because it was known that Caswallon befriended Tros, but mere suspicion of sorcery was enough to cause a boycott of the shipyard; and even Tros' own slaves began to shirk their work as something never destined to be finished.

The Northmen, defeated in their own land by a rival clan—driven to put to sea under their own chief Sigurdsen, caught raiding in the Thames by Tros on his return from Gaul in Cæsar's bireme, and by him made prisoners, by him set free on sole condition they should be his faithful inner-guard and loyal coadventurers, seamen to a man, axe-fighters, who could handle reef and steer, or row when a head-wind whipped the seas into a cauldron of confusion—were a superstitious lot, all forty-eight of them.

They had grown obedient since Tros had trounced them soundly for rebellion, and they understood the business of ship-building. None had to show them how to fit the crossbeams to the ribs, to caulk seams or to fasten planking with the larch-root pegs

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that tighten and grow stronger with the wet. They were experts at the rigging. They even grasped in half a day the principle of building oar-banks, one above the other, without sacrificing steadiness or strength. The staggered benches for the rowers, and the triple strain to be absorbed without increasing weight, were problems they delighted in, and Tros could leave them to invent new joints and reenforcements while his back was turned. But they could gloom like the gray of a Baltic twilight.

IT HAD leaked out, first, that Tros believed the world was round and that he meant to sail around it. Tros had told that burning thought of his to Sigurdsen one night under a solemn pledge of secrecy. But Sigurdsen had got drunk at his own sister's, Tros' wife's funeral, and had revealed the secret to the others. They were seamen who did not mind drunkenness, raiding, looting and the usual concomitants of war. Nor did they pray too often or admire the character of men who did.

But to talk, even in secret, of sailing around the world was altogether too much like blasphemy, even for their strong stomachs. If they could have believed the theory it would have been, in their opinion, irreligious and indecent to discuss it. But to spiritual blasphemy was added temporal danger, since they knew, as everybody always had known, that the world was flat and over its distant rim the sea poured into eternal darkness.

So they spoke of Tros' obsession in gloomy undertones and at night, when they gathered around the fire in their own snug quarters, they conjectured what would happen when they should reach the world's rim and be caught in the undertow of the eternal waterfall. Could men approach Valhalla by that route? Or would their souls go tumbling forever downward into dark oblivion? The problem interfered with work and led to grosser superstition.

Some of them, when Tros went to Gaul with Caswallon to rescue Fflur, had seen the havoc wrought in Cæsar's camp by the hot stink balls, and they knew that Eough, who had taught Tros how to make the things was a reputed sorcerer. They had all seen the mixture burn with its appalling stench when Tros dispersed the rioters. It was true, they had seen the yellow crystals brought from under the horse-manure in the cave below Caswallon's stable, and they knew the rest was sulphur, charcoal, resin and plain sawdust. But it stood to reason no such mixture had any right to explode unless the devils of the underworld had been involved in it. So far the infernal stuff had only harmed their enemies, but it might just as easily reverse its energy and suffocate themselves.

"With a stink from the caverns of hell he loads the ship, and into hell he purposes to plunge us, ship and all, when we reach the world's edge," Sigurdsen confided, staring at the embers on the hearth. "No luck can come of such dark business. Tros had the best of it against the Romans that time, but look you what happened. Was his own wife Helma not the first one to be slain, and she expecting child?"

And then the Britons, rebels, criminals and homeless vagabonds, slaves to a man—excepting only one of them, and he but newly freed—who had been given to Tros by Caswallon in return for aid in the suppression of a rising. There were near two hundred of them without hope or prospect, unless that Tros might set them free for good behaviour—nor hope after that except of service under Tros on foreign seas in return for whatever payment he might make—and no doubt slavery again, in foreign galleys, whenever some prowling Roman admiral should catch Tros napping and surround him. Stink balls and the world's edge, sorcery though both might be, were of less concern to them than the fact that Tros would take them away from Britain.

They hated the sea and everything in or on it, except the fish. Homeless, except for Tros' long labor sheds; hopeless, except for Tros' goodwill, inevitably outlawed, should they dare to run away, and with nothing but Tros between them and a far worse servitude, they dreaded nonetheless to leave their little corner of the earth and were already homesick at the thought of it.

Even Gildas, son of a fallen rebel leader, freed by Tros in Gaul for service rendered and now serving of his own free will for clothing, food and pay, aristocrat by birth, with nothing to lose and all to gain by any fortune that should profit Tros, hung back from the proposed adventure. He had not been taken into confidence, but he had overheard the Northmen talking, and the secrets that a man learns that way are a lot more

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mentally disturbing than the facts he truly knows.

He approached Tros, down under the ship one night when Tros was searching with a lantern to make sure no undetected visitor had set some heap of shavings smoldering. There had been a dozen attempts to sneak into the yard at twilight and destroy the wooden ways.

"Lord Tros," said Gildas, speaking manfully, for new-won freedom sat like a god between his shoulder blades, "I have a thought that would do you no injury if you should listen to it."

"Speak your mind," said Tros, "and if you change mine you shall have the credit."

But he went on swinging the lantern, poking into corners with a long stick, not suggesting much alacrity of vaccillation.

Gildas hesitated. It is not so easy to talk confidences to a man whose back is turned, bent forward, hunting danger in the draughty darkness. It was not until a gust of east wind blew the lantern out and Tros had to find the fire pot and relight it, that Gildas' thought took form in words.

"Lord Tros, you have a great ship here, but a crew too small, that will never serve you well unless—"

"Unless I know how to make them, eh? That shall be my task," said Tros, and the lantern light shone yellow on his stubborn face as he stooped to replace the horn cylinder around the flaxen wick.

"Unless, Lord Tros, their numbers should be increased and they should have work that they understand."

"Do they understand full bellies, the whip for laziness, freedom for good behavior?" Tros asked, and he went on poking into corners with the stick.

"Lord Tros, they have been told you will sail first of all to Rome, and they have heard that the Romans will put them into an arena for sport and watch them being torn by wild beasts. It is not easy to encourage men who have that fear in them."

"I notice you try to discourage me," Tros answered, but his back was turned. He was noticing the rain, remembering whether all deck openings were covered. "You have a project of your own. What is it?"

He walked away, and Gildas had to follow.

"No project, but a word of advice, Lord Tros."

Tros climbed the ladder up the ship's side, and stood on the long, wet deck observing that the watchmen had sought shelter from the rain. He ordered Gildas to go and rout them out from under the hatch coverings.

"Warn them that if I should catch them skulking there will be whippings! Cuff them about the head, and tell them they are lucky it was you, not I, who walked the rounds!"

HE RETURNED down the ladder and examined the magazine where he had stored his chemical. There presently young Gildas joined him.

"Now, if there were a raid in view, Lord Tros—some chance to prove themselves against a weaker adversary, with the hope of plunder—"

He stopped, because at last Tros turned and faced him, holding up the lantern. Its rays showed slanting rain that blew in squalls between them, dripping from their tarred hoods. Gildas' expression began to suggest nervousness, which made him look older than Tros, although he was several years the younger.

"You seek to prove your value," Tros remarked, moving the lantern the better to see Gildas' face. "But if words meant anything to me I should have slain you for your impudence while you were yet my slave, instead of ignoring what you said and freeing you for what you did. If you know my crew is short and undependable, be you the stouter-hearted against the day when we must depend on them in spite of it!"

"Lord Tros, I only sought to—"

"To make a pirate of me! To make of me a rogue like Cæsar! To persuade me to attack some harmless folk against whom I have neither grudge nor ground, except my own ability to hit and run! Mark this, now. When I need advice, I open up my thought and let the gods pour wisdom in. From you I ask—and I will have—alertness, swift obedience and such loyalty as a ship yields to the helm. And mark this, too. Remember it. When a pinch comes, as it will, if the Britons in my crew act shamefully, you will not go blameless, since you are one of them, and yet a free man and my officer."

Tros strode away, swinging the lantern, toward his own snug quarters that had been lonelier than a hermit's cave since Helma died. He had set the slave-girl free who used to wait on his young wife, and the girl

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had vanished, none knew whither. Conops had resumed old ways, enacting all parts, cook, bed-chamber valet, serving man, sword-sharpener, factotum, confidant. The hut was all ship-shape and neat, where Helma had kept house with satisfying woman touches that a man does not notice much until he has to live again without them.

As Tros entered, standing like a great bear in the doorway, rain dripping from his bearskin coat and from his tarred hood, Conops viewed the wooden floor with pride, for he had scrubbed and sanded it. The heavy woolen carpet Helma laid had been removed. Benches, stools, chests and the armchair made from an oaken cask, stood in rigidly straight lines against the walls and even the sticks on the clay hearth were laid with parallel precision.

The expression on Conops' one-eyed face was pertly loyal, asserting what even his privileged lips hardly dared to frame in words—

"You and I, master, are men who need no women to make life soft for us!"

And it was true. Tros knew it. In his heart there was an empty place that he had never known of until Helma filled it, and he had hardly realized it even so until a Roman arrow robbed him of her. Now he understood that she had filled it all too well, and the recluse in him, inherited from his austere old sire, closed such a wall around her memory as not another woman in the world should ever penetrate. He had made his mind up finally on that score.

He had married Helma because it was not in him to impose indignity on a prisoner descended from a long line of nobility. Now, less than five months later had his dying sire not warned him? She was dead, and there were ashes in his heart. Vividly he recalled his father's prophecy, made beneath the poop of a Phœnician ship, at sea:

"My son, you were born in wedlock, but you were not born to a common destiny. Even as a woman, loving me, reduced me from what I might have been to what I am, so women will love you, though some will hate you. And they who love you will so do to their own loss, though they who hate you will serve your ends. Yet there will come a day when you will love one woman to the exclusion of all else, and her you will serve until you both go down into disaster. But there will be no selfishness in that, nor thought of marrying, and from disaster you shall pluck the key of mysteries."

"When it is too late?" Tros had asked, for he believed in death-bed prophecies, and he had listened as to the Delphic priestess or the Hierarch of Memphis.

"Nothing is too late to him who holds the Key," his father answered, and then left the body Cæsar's torturers had racked.

Grim consolation to recall! Tros never crossed the threshold of the hut without reflecting on it and determining to let no woman love him—to her own undoing or to his. That part of him belonged to Helma. None should replace her. So grimly would he steel his heart against all women that not even death-bed prophecies made by a Prince of Samothrace should have a chance of coming true!

That night he threw his bearskin off and sat down in the cask-armchair more resolute than usual, devoid of appetite, although Conops tempted him with beans and venison not more than sipping at the mug of warm, mead, conscious that the memory of Helma fretted him—he could almost feel her presence in the room—and so more careful to control himself. Emotions such as thoughts of Helma carried in their wake, he shunned. He must find hard stuff to bite on, and quite suddenly he thought of it.

"Lives Skell?" he asked.

He had forgotten Skell, since that ungodly night when Skell himself brought news to Verulam that Cæsar's men had carried off Caswallon's wife and his. He had praised Skell for the speed with which he brought the message. Then, in the cold, gray rawness of a winter's dawn, remembering that Skell was bastard British-Northman with a bastard sense of honor and no manhood behind the greedy, greenish-gray eyes, he had forced from Skell confession that he knew about the plot two weeks before it happened, and had held his tongue in hope of profit.

SO HE had ordered Skell into irons and solitary confinement. And what with crossing to Gaul to steal Fflur back from Cæsar and Helma's death and all the worry of resuming work on the construction of the ship when he returned, he had hardly thought of Skell again until that minute.

"Aye, the red rascal lives," said Conops. "His eyes are as red as his beard now, from peeping through the draughty chinks, and

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because for pity's sake we let him have a fire and there is no hole in the prison roof, so the smoke can't escape any better than he can. He eats as much as ever, and though I don't doubt he has stiffened in his fetters, there are no sores. We let him have fish-oil for wrists and ankles, and he thrives like a fat toad in a hole."

"Strike off his fetters. Bring him here," Tros ordered. And then, to please Conops, fell to at the food.

A half-hour later, for they had to find a blacksmith to cut through the fetter rivets, Conops and a guard of Britons brought Skell to the door.

"Bring him in. Dismiss the guard," Tros ordered, and Skell stood before him, red-eyed, with his red beard tangled into knots, holding his wrists as if a weight still hung from them and reeking of the fish-oil. Skell said nothing, which might or might not prove that he had learned a little wisdom in the solitary darkness of the prison hut.

"You poor trickster, you puzzle me!" Tros remarked when he had stared at him a long time. "I can understand a whole rogue, who acts generously on occasion for the sake of some one else. You, when the gods provide you opportunity to play a man's part, play it with one hand only, using the other against yourself! If you should save my life, I could not trust you not to try to kill me the next minute! Speak."

"What shall I say?" Skell answered.

"Oho! So is it! We have learned a little shame, have we! Have fetters done to you what liberality could not? Do you feel like a leper at last, and would like to like yourself?"

"Whatever I say, you will not believe," Skell retorted, and his chin was, it may be, a trifle higher than he used to hold it when a bold man looked him in the face.

Tros crashed his fist down on the table with force enough to drive a nail into the oak.

"Pluto! Who are you to say what I believe or disbelieve! You poor fool! If you knew your own mind half as well as you think you can read another's, I might feel some respect for you!"

"I know my own mind," Skell said, and his lips closed tight over his teeth. His red-rimmed eyes looked straight at Tros.

"Well, well! Reveal yourself! I listen."

Tros threw his weight back in the chair and drummed with the fingers of his left hand on a heavy, jeweled sword-hilt.

"I would rather be killed," said Skell, "than to continue living, unless my future holds more than the past. I didn't ask to come into the world. Or, if I did, I don't remember it. My mother was a British slave, but my father a free Northman, so, though I was not born free, I was set free before I was old enough to know the difference. You would think a free man would have equal rights with others. But not so. I was known as Skell, the bastard. And I tell you, Lord Tros, I have had to use my wits to come by such small standing as I did have when you first knew me, until I was caught in the Gildas rebellion and enslaved and turned over to you like one of the steers men pay to the King in lieu of taxes. Such training as mine was, such self-defense against the Britons' clannishness and such expedients to gain riches as the only way to recognition—birth having been denied me—make a liar of a man. Lord Tros, I daresay you would be a liar if you had had half my difficulties.

"You don't know what it means, Lord Tros, to feel that free men hate or despise you, and slaves regard you as one of themselves by right, only a bit more fortunate! Your equals claim a superiority that carks and galls, and you can't break through the wall they raise. So you turn false, as much from hopelessness as from any other reason. I know I did.

"I lent money, deprived men of their land. I played spy for the Romans long before Cæsar ever thought of trying his invasion. I made men fear me whenever I could and however I could, and I betrayed them when it suited me. I would have betrayed those rebels whom I persuaded to rise against Caswallon if I had had time. But I was caught too soon, lost everything, and since then I have been your slave. Slavery did not sweeten my disposition. But of late I have been thinking in the dark.

"Lord Tros, it takes time for a man to change himself. I have a habit, like a fox, of having always one hole in reserve, one back way out of everything. If I see a profit to myself and to another, instinct makes me keep another secret course clear, to which I can turn at a moment's notice in order to wreck that other man. I have learned to trust nobody, because I knew none trusted me.

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"But now I have done with all that, and and if it is too late, I am sorry. But I have done with it. I can't change in a minute or a month. I can't make you believe me, and I won't try. But I have told the truth.

"BY ZEUS, I think you have! Is it the first time?" Tros asked.

"No. I told the truth to your wife—who they tell me is dead here in this house, when I was teaching her the British tongue that you and she might understand each other."

Tros leaned forward, chin on hand, elbow on the table.

"Careful!" he warned. "If you lie now, your last chance is gone! What said my wife, Helma?"

"That if I would prove my good faith, she would be my friend."

"And you, she having said that, knowing of the Roman's plot to carry her to Gaul, said nothing?"

"Yes. I tell you a man can not change in a moment."

"And now you ask me—"

"I ask nothing!" Skell interrupted. "You sent for me. You said to me, 'Speak.' I have spoken."

Tros leaned back again, the lids half-lowered over the amber eyes.

"I think you have spoken truth," he said at last. "And yet one swallow makes no summer. You have been a crafty liar in your day, Skell, and it may be now that you tell truth craftily, with hidden purposes behind that mask of yours. You and I—we are master and slave. What is your thought about that?"

They breathed a dozen breaths before Skell answered:

"It is the law. You own me. But as to the right and wrong of it, though I have owned slaves, I confess I don't know."

"Then I will tell you," said Tros. "The past is like a stream that turned the mill, and there are men who live in the past who float downstream and drown. Such men are slaves. The way to keep from drowning is to swim ashore. The shore is duty. And you are fortunate in that you have but one duty, whereas I have many. There are many men dependent on me, and you have one master to serve. I never sell slaves. I give them freedom when they earn it, but I make them prove to me their right to enjoy freedom, knowing that unless they have it in them to serve me faithfully they will never know enough to serve themselves. I do not bestow freedom as a reward. That is not my province.

"I have not sufficient impudence to try to unsurp God's prerogative. But when I see a man, my slave by law, responsible to me, by acts not mouthing of mock-loyalty, revealing manhood in himself, I know at once that man is fit for freedom. Skell, may my right hand betray me if I rob a man of anything I know is his! When you are fit for freedom you shall go free on the instant, and I charge no tenth of a man's market value, as the Romans do."

He was watching Skell's face, scanning it as, on a poop at sea, he scanned the weather, leaving intuition to interpret what the eyes observed. Skell spoke again—

"Lord Tros, it is not easy for a proud man to accept slavery."

"I know nothing in life worth doing that is easy!" Tros retorted. "I think when we are dead, we rest a while. Until then—work, with spells of sleep, in which our friends the gods pour into us such wisdom as our work has made us fit to hold!"

"I am persuaded," Skell said quietly.

"Fool! I seek not to persuade you!" Tros sat up again and laid his great fist on the table. "You asked the way, like a man who is lost in the dark. I told it. Take or leave it! But as long as you are my slave, I will do my duty and demand obedience. I own your body. Nothing less than your own soul can unlock that barrier to freedom."

"I am persuaded, nevertheless," Skell answered.

It annoyed Tros to be told he had persuaded anybody. Adept at persuasion, by the very force of his own passion to decide all issues for himself, he liked to think that other men could judge as definitely as himself, and when they yielded he preferred to think they had seen eye to eye with him unaided.

"Well, take warning. Try not to persuade me!" he retorted. "It is I who will decide whether you are fit for freedom, if ever that time comes. You are released from prison. Take care lest I have to lock you in again. Conops, give Skell the key of the hut he used to occupy, restore his name to the muster-roll, class him among the Northmen, and put him to work at

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dawn on rigging the main shrouds. Fall away. Shut the door after you."

## CHAPTER III

### FFLUR PAYS A DEBT

CASWALLON was the king and Tros' friend, but there was not much that he dared to do to relieve the boycott on the shipyard. Tros was forced to send small boats upriver, two and even three days' journey, to trade for provisions. His hired blacksmiths deserted, and he, with his own hand, had to teach selected slaves the anvil work and such odds and ends of casting as remained to do.

Then there were the huge and complicated catapults to set in place, with double uprights rising thirty feet above the deck, from the top of which ton-weights of lead fell on to basket-work cushions below the waterline, providing force for the projection of the hot stink balls along a trough that could be moved for elevation and direction.

Last, but not least, there were provisions for a voyage to be accumulated. He would have to start shorthanded, but even so he had a crew of two hundred and fifty men to provide for. There was deer meat to be smoked, and fish; wheat by the ton; turnips, carrots, and dried apples that Fflur showed him how to prepare and that the Druids said would help to prevent scurvy; mutton, beef and hog meat to be salted down; tallow by the hogshead, for a ship needs grease as fire needs fuel; charcoal for the cooking; medicines begged from the Druids, who according to their law might not refuse, but who stipulated, nevertheless, that Tros should be gone before midsummer day.

He held out for more than medicines before he struck that bargain with them. As any looker-on with half an eye could see, the Druids were fallen from their high estate since the great Lord Druid Taliesan departed to another world. Ambition had developed. There were rival factions for the leadership, some seeking to increase their influence by cautiously intriguing with the kings, some on the other hand plotting to weaken the kings that their own authority might be the greater, but all agreed on one point—Tros was dangerous, because he knew too much.

He went to interview their spokesmen in a sun-warmed clearing where great stones stood in a circle far within an oak forest. That interview seemed barren of results, but later they came to see him in the shipyard, secretly at night, lest men should say they were condoning sorcery. They offered medicines and some instruction how to use them, and they smiled when Tros made heavier demands, because they knew he intended to leave Britain in any event.

But Caswallon had advised Tros, and Fflur had seconded, with her usual gray-eyed insight into how to manage men.

"You are going to Rome to seek peace for us Britons," said Fflur. "It is fair we should pay for it, but it is not fair that this corner of Britain should pay all the price, or nearly all. The other tribes are just as much concerned as we are."

"Aye, but whoever can make them pay, has genius!" Caswallon snorted.

"The Druids have already made them pay," Fflur answered. "They, we, all of us have paid the Druids ten times over for much more than they will ever do. It was all right while Taliesan lived. He was a true Lord Druid and none grudged the tithe of gold and pearls. Whoever had pearls, gave of his own free will the greatest. Whoever had gold, gave a tenth. So the Druids are rich."

"And they will pay you to go if you can make them believe you will not go otherwise," Caswallon commented. But he said it in a low voice, as if afraid of his own words. Himself, he would never have dared to offer an affront to any Druid, nor even to a Druid who he knew was false to the druidic teachings, for he was Celtic to the marrow of his bones, as meek in the presence of spiritual teachers as he was fierce in battle.

So Tros spoke cavalierly to the Druids.

"I will not go," he assured them, "unless you do your part. Rather I will launch my ship and raid Cæsar's ports as it suits me, using British harbors for a base. That will bring Cæsar the sooner, so we can have it out with him and learn which way the Gods decide the fate of Britain."

The Druids shuddered at the very name of Cæsar, knowing well what fate he would impose on them. Their hospices were crowded with the refugees from Gaul, many of whom showed the marks of Cæsar's torturers, and all of whom knew what had

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happened to the Druids caught in Cæsar's net. When spiritual vision wanes and temporal ambition takes the place of it, men flinch from being burned alive in baskets. Compromise creeps into their convictions.

"Pearls!" said Tros. "You have. Rome covets. I can not compel Rome, but I can buy Cæsar's enemies. I could buy all Rome except perhaps one man, if I had pearls enough."

"Who told you we have pearls?"'a Druid asked.

"The same one who told me the world is round! I, I, myself! I know it!"

Long into a mystic night in May they argued, seated in the shed where Tros had stored his horrible explosive. Barrels of the stuff were all around them; barrels and great lead balls, as yet unfilled. Their white robes gleamed ghostly in the moonlight streaming through the open door, where Conops sat on guard against intruders. Tros looked like a great black bear among them, growling from the deepest shadow.

"What if we give you pearls? What proof have we how you will use them?"

"None!" he answered. "Read ye your own hearts. I have read mine for you."

"If you fail?"

"Then blame the gods, not me! I, Tros, have spoken. I will add no word to it. With pearls—" he pulled off his black, tarred cap and held it out toward them—"this full of pearls, I will go to Rome and try to put a stick in Cæsar's wheel. Without pearls I will stay here and let come what may."

The night after that they brought pearls to him, a dozen huge ones in a small gold casket lined with fleece, and a thousand of mixed sizes in a woollen bag. He tossed the treasure into the bronze box that had once been Cæsar's money-chest and slammed the lid down, giving them no inkling that, except for those pearls, the chest was now almost empty.

"Let the gods say whether that is price enough," he commented. "The gods know what and why you pay. The gods will judge what I do. Now I would advise you, speed the parting guest! Bid all men aid instead of hindering the launching of my ship!"

So, subtly the Druids began to change the mental atmosphere until Tros actually suffered from embarassment of riches in the form of unskilled labor and unsuitable supplies.

INSTEAD of boycotting, men brought him all the trash they did not need—the moldy grain, sick oxen to be killed and salted down, old horses for the same ungraceful fate, discouraged-looking slaves devoid of teeth or suffering from ague, who they said would make fine rowers, spoiled honey, hides half full of holes, moth-eaten woollen cloth, and all the odds and ends they had no use for, eagerly demanding money, and annoyed when Tros refused it.

There was nearly another riot. Tros was charged with cheating, by a noisy mob that refused to take its rubbish home again and called the judges of the land to witness he was liable for damages from rain and theft. Caswallon had to call out all his bodyguard, to use spearbutts and to charge into the crowd with chariots that had wooden staves set to the axle-hubs in place of the murderous scythes.

Then, two weeks before the date set for the launching, one last effort by the powers that impede men's plans—blunt mutiny! Tros' British slaves, aware that nothing else could save them from a life at sea, deserted by night in a body, and before Tros could prevent, some Jack-of-anybody's-business-but-his-own had fired the beacons and set bells a-ringing to alarm the countryside. That meant proscription. Every fugitive was outlawed from the moment the desertion became public news, a price by law on each deserter's head, payable by the owner to whoever the captor might be; one-third of the fugitive's market value if brought in alive, or, if dead, one-tenth of it.

So a hunt began, with all the countryside in arms and no hope there would not be bloodshed. Tros did not dare to remove his Northmen from the shipyard without first making some other provision for guarding it. So he mounted horseback, an expedient that with all his sailor's heart he loathed, and rode full-gallop to Caswallon's house on Ludd's Hill, falling, as the sun rose, in the mixen of the horse-yard when the weary brute came to a halt too suddenly.

Caswallon was up betimes, for he had heard the clamor of the alarm bells, but he proved a sorry comforter, smiling behind his hand while half-a-dozen grooms

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removed the stable stuff from Tros' cloak.

"You will get about half of your slaves back, probably—at so much each. I will instruct the judge. He shall assess you lightly. The dead ones won't cost anything to speak of."

It was Fflur who solved the difficulty. She came to the great front porch where the swallows were all nesting and the men and women already waited who had favors to ask of the king, winding up her long braids and calling to the grooms to bring her chariot.

"Fie!" she cried out to Caswallon. "Laggard! Talking while the ricks burn! Lay a false scent quickly. Then clap your own pack on the right trail!"

"Fflur is always right!" Caswallon muttered. The words had grown into a formula from so much repitition, although he did not always recognize her rightness until after the event.

And then came Gildas, riding a mud-bespattered, foaming horse to death, vaulting as the beast fell, finishing the last three hundred yards on foot.

"Lord Tros, they have gone westward. They ——"

He could not speak for gasping. But no need. Caswallon knew.

"Horns!" he exploded. "Trumpets! Fifty mounted men! The rally! All directions! Hurry the crowd downriver! Tell them Tros' slaves are making in a body for the woods beyond the Medway!"

Never on earth were finer horsemen than the Britons. Give them leave to show off, and they had four legs beneath them faster than the partridges take wing from stubble fields. The silver horns and trumpets split the morning air as hoofs went thundering through the gate and, fanwise, fifty of Caswallon's gentlemen-at-arms rode belly-to-the-earth to round up groups of searchers and view-hallo them eastward in the wrong direction.

"Runnimede!" Gildas panted.

Caswallon nodded. It was a far cry to the swamps by Runnimede where desperate men too frequently outwore the patience of pursuers. He had already ordered out the chariots. To the summons of a golden bugle more than a hundred bow-and-arrow men turned out, making up the whole force of the standing army. Twenty more breaths, and already four white stallions pawed the air as the king's own chariot came to a plunging halt in front of him. He jumped in, seizing the reins from the charioteer.

"I caught one," said Gildas, recovering his breath at last. "He had returned to steal an ax. He nearly slew me with it."

"Lives he?" Tros demanded.

"Aye, you will need him for the oar-work."

Tros suppressed a smile. He foresaw that he had a good lieutenant in the making. However, too much praise turns willing heads.

"What then?"

"I tripped and tied him. Conops came, put a handful of salt in his mouth, showed him water. He soon told where the rest had gone."

Fflur's chariot was seesawing behind two red Icenian mares that squealed for exercise, she reining them with one hand as she stood with a foot on the low seat balancing herself, and watched the five-and-twenty war-machines, whose stallions squealed and bit each other, rearing as their drivers formed them into five lines, four men to a chariot.

"Why do we wait?" Caswallon asked.

Tros jumped in. Gildas followed. Then Orwic came, driving uphill from the direction of Ludd's bridge, his handsome face alight with the fun of living at top speed, swinging his chariot on one wheel at the gallop and then backing until, hub by hub, he was in line with Fflur.

"What madness next?" he laughed. "All Lunden yelps on a stray dog's scent! The roe runs yonder."

He nodded over-shoulder, roughly westward, up the river.

"Ride!" Caswallon roared, and they were off, all eight-and-twenty chariots in action at the gesture of his arm, before the word could clip the air. He never finished it. It was a vowel cut in half. There was neither shout nor whip-crack, but two hundred hoofs struck earth together and the five lines wheeled into a single stream that poured through the gate behind its leaders, no collisions, no hubs striking, no sound except the bumping of bronze wheels, the squeak of straining basket-work and the staccato thunder of the hooves.

CASWALLON drove like wind, Fflur keeping pace with him and Orwic not a dozen yards behind. Before a mile had ribboned under wheel, the leaders were beyond hail and the five-and-twenty let the intervening



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distance grow, conserving their own horses' strength. Not long, and there was no procession visible, only when Tros listened, he could hear the thump and splash when they who followed plunged into a ford, and now and then he caught a glimpse of them hand-galloping across a crest of rising ground.

So, for an hour, they drove full-pelt within a furlong of the swamps beside the river, crossing long arms of the forest, skirting the fenced meadows until they reached a hill from whose summit they could see the Thames curved like a silver snake below them. There Caswallon drew rein and let the foaming stallions breathe awhile, his eyes and Fflur's intent on the sunlit view.

Smoke came from fifty homesteads. There were cattle browsing in a hundred fields. Peace lay along the valley like the smile of the Earth Goddess.

"When I tax them for their own protection, they rebel!" Caswallon remarked dryly, his eyes still searching out the details of the landscape.

He was a huntsman born, but Fflur's eyes just as soon as his detected an alertness in the movement of a herd of fallow-deer that grazed, five miles away, on the short, sweet grass between a copse-edge and the high fence of a homestead. Orwic was the first to speak:

"Men moving—not toward them, but up-wind and rather quietly. There's a road over there beyond the river. It runs between high banks topped with brambles. That's where your runaways are, Tros! They'll be dog tired and all in a herd—hot-foot—keeping together, lest stragglers get in trouble with the farmers. Where did they cross the river, though?"

Caswallon pointed. Down a vista between tree-tops they could see an abandoned ferry-scow that lay against the far bank of the river, half in water.

"The tide's flowing," Tros remarked.

"And in an hour," said Fflur, "there will be a hundred feet of soft mud there. No good for chariot wheels!"

Caswallon laughed, the quick, short bark he always gave when he could see solutions.

"The fools expect pursuit. There was a second ferry-scow. They've sunk it. I wager they've scuttled the one we can see. If we should cross the river here, and it might be done, we could swim the horses. They would scatter, and it would take a month of hunting to get half of them. The thing they don't expect, is to be headed off. There's a ford by Teddington."

"If you get ahead of them and hunt them back toward Lunden, they'll be killed to a man," Fflur objected. "Our Lundeners will be in no good humor after having wasted half a morning on a wrong scent."

"Mother of my sons, I laugh!" Caswallon answered. "They have been afoot since two hours before dawn. How much farther do you think the fools can run? True, Tros has overfed them, but a man's strength has a limit. When they find us in the way, they will lose all heart and lie down. We will drive them home between the chariots, slowly, like pigs to market!"

Chariot after chariot came galloping and drew rein on the hilltop, breathing the horses, until all five-and-twenty were in line again and all the bow-and-arrow men had gathered beside Caswallon's wheels to receive his orders, leather cases over their shoulders with the arrow ends protruding where they could pluck them with the right hand easily and fast.

Tros felt as resentful as a fisherman whose seine-net has been torn through his own carelessness. No talking could improve the situation. Advice from him would be impertinence. It was he, not they, who had lost two hundred slaves. They, not he, who must retrieve them for him. It was more than probable that, being in a band and desperate, the runaways had done more mischief than the sinking of one scow. More likely than not, they had murdered lonely farmers and anybody else who might happen to have seen them, their one hope of escape depending chiefly on a long start. They would have done everything possible to prevent the true direction of their flight from being known.

And law was law. The law of Britain as concerned slaves varied very little from that of other countries. For whatever a slave, fugitive or not, might do his owner was responsible. Which was fair enough, considering that an owner was allowed to punish his own slaves as he saw fit, and though he might not kill them he might turn them over to the public executioner, his own unchallengable accusation being tantamount to sentence by a court of law.

So there would be a bill to pay, none knew how big. For every murder done there would be a dozen or more of the

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runaways tortured, to discover the real culprits, who would be put to death. And tortured men make poor beginners at the deep-sea oar-work that Tros had in view.

Not least toward the making of the loss disastrous was the point of view of bow-and-arrow men, turned out at a moment's notice and brought full-pelt in pursuit. Such men were hardly likely not to want to flesh an arrow once or twice before accepting slaves' surrender. It appeared to Tros he would be lucky if he only lost a hundred of the fugitives killed, maimed and missing. And he would probably have to reward Caswallon's men at something less than one third of the market price of each survivor, since not even the king's friendship could offset the law of Britain.

However, Fflur surprized him. Her gray eyes observed the glowering disgust in his.

"Lord Tros," she laughed, "you came hot-foot to Gaul to rescue me from Cæsar. Watch now how I repay."

She paused a moment, signing to her husband and to Orwic to be still, then studying the faces of the bowmen. Hot they were, and hard-eyed, leashed hounds, eager to be loosed against the quarry.

"Does any of you love me?" she inquired, and for a moment after that they stared at her, some grinning. Then there was a murmur of her name, a rising buzz of protest.

She knew, without their saying it, they loved her. All did. Why the question? Two or three men strung their bows—expression of their willingness to fight for her, and die if need be.

"Try us!" said a big man standing close beside her chariot wheel. "How many shall we slay?"

"You, you at least might know better!" she answered. "When the town judge sentenced you to lose a hand for stealing, was it I who charged you? Or do I remember rightly that I paid the fine, and over and above that, too, the restitution money? Was it I or some one else who begged a place for you in the Lord Caswallon's following? Do you think the maiming of a poor wretch pleases me?"

THE man grinned at her sheepishly, leaning his weight on his bow, unstringing it.

"Is there one man here for whom I have not done favors?" Fflur asked, raising her voice. "Wounds, brawling and dismissals, wives in child-birth, nursed, debts, and the prospect of slavery for debt."

Murmuring again—another protest of a deep, remembered gratitude from men who were none the less puzzled by her choosing that time and that place for an appeal to their affection.

But Caswallon got down from the chariot to feel his horses' forelegs, satisfied that Fflur could do with men-at-arms what he, their battle-leader, could not.

Orwic looked stolidly bored. The climate, and it may be, breeding, had produced in him a distaste for scenes in public that even remotely touched the sentimental. He was for action, first, last, all the time, nor too much talk about it afterward unless by way of humorous, half cynical review.

"Ludd's blood!" he grumbled. "What now?"

"The Lord Tros helped to rescue me from Gaul," Fflur went on, using the vibrating middle notes of a voice that resembled her father, Mygnach's. And they did say Mygnach had such magic in him that the birds sat still in the trees to listen when he chanted his orison to the sun. "The Lord Tros goes to Rome to risk his life and all he has that we in Britain may be saved from Cæsar. I would like to treat the Lord Tros gratefully. I think a gift from you, for my sake, if you will, of all those slaves of his, recaptured and unharmed, without the customary price on them, would be an offering the gods would call a manly gift. What say you?"

There was not much that they could say. Some grinned, half-shamefacedly, like boys in good time lectured against poaching, that they had intended, and regretfully refrained from. Many of them nodded, trying to look statesmanly sagacious. All of them watched Tros, expecting he would speak. But Tros sat silent in the chariot, not pleased that he must be recipient of favors. Only he knew how immensely he preferred that others should receive his largesse, rather than he theirs. But also, only he knew that the money he had won from Cæsar half-a-year ago had dwindled almost to the last coin, lavished on the ship, and now he had nothing but the Druids' pearls out of which to pay fines and ransoms. He was nearer to disaster than Fflur guessed, and carkingly self-critical.

Tros had the trick of silence, though, as Orwic had asserted, he could blow like a

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northeaster when he chose with gusts of words that carried all before him. Orwic, like the others, looked to him to speak now and, since Tros continued staring straight in front of him, tried urging.

"Tros, what say you?"

"Fflur is right," he answered, and sat still. He had an intuition that, though Fflur was right, some other force or set of forces, whether human or superhuman made small difference just then, was gone awry. He ached for action, yet did not dare to show impatience lest the men-at-arms should take that cue to extort a ransom after all. He was trying, with all his self-control, to open his mind and let the gods pour information in, ignoring semblances and listening for the inner voice that seldom failed him. But the only thought that seemed to bubble and repeat itself behind his brain was Skell! Skell!

Caswallon took the reins.

"Are we agreed? Then ride!" he shouted, and they were off once more, down a long lane between sheep pastures where the deer browsed at the forest's edge and awkward fawns loped out of sight behind their dams, to turn and stare when they were gone.

There was no more hesitancy and no speech. Caswallon was in action now, each move fore-calculated, every fraction of the horses' strength considered and expended with the goal in mind.

They thundered downhill, leaping fallen tree trunks, so that the chariots were like the slings of catapults, and Tros had to cling to the wickerwork side with both hands, taking short cuts that would have scared a squirrel, one wheel over a pit's edge, and nothing but the speed and the weight of a horse's shoulder on the pole to keep the lot from overturning; leaping a ditch without so much as checking, crashing through the farmer's fence beyond it, around three ricks and through the oaken paling on the far side, knocking it down with the bronze-headed chariot pole. They left a swath behind them like the path of a winter's hurricane.

And so to the river by Rhyd-y-Cadgerbydan.

"Where, if Cæsar ever gets this far, I will give him and his legions battle,"* said Caswallon, pausing to let the horses breathe again before they plunged breast-deep into the river.

*When Cæsar invaded Britain for the second time, this was where Caswallon actually did prepare his final stand, driving stakes into the ford and holding it with dogged courage until deserted by his men. By preparing this site for a pitched battle he succeeded in decoying Cæsar and his legions away from "Lunden Town," which Cæsar never saw or he would surely have mentioned the place in his "*De Bello Gallico*."

## CHAPTER IV

### "THE FOOL! LORD ZEUS, WHAT SHALL I DO WITH HIM?"

FROM the ford to the road the runaways were taking was only a few miles, and the going easy. Caswallon drove full speed.

"To wind the horses well, lest they should neigh and betray us when we set an ambush," he explained.

He had the lay of all the country in his mind and chose a place where two lanes met in a hollow, half-filled with elms and brambles. Water and the traffic of the years had cut the lanes so deep that banks on either side of them rose twenty feet high. In the center of the hollow, near the intersection of the lanes, was a pool of limpid water, brook-fed, with fleecy clouds and branches of the overhanging elms reflected in it, a sure temptation to leg-weary runaways to rest themselves and wait for stragglers.

"For whom they will certainly wait," Caswallon argued. "They will not dare to leave lame men along the road, any more than a hunted fox leaves more scent than he can help, but crosses brooks and the bare rock where his scent won't lie. There will be a rearguard, urging on the laggards with sharpened sticks."

The setting of the ambush was a simple matter. On the theory that perhaps the fugitives had stolen a few horses on their way that might neigh and so give the alarm, Caswallon ordered the chariot teams unyoked and led away to a considerable distance. Then he posted all his men, well hidden, around the rim of the hollow, with orders not to loose one arrow in any event unless he should give them leave by signal.

One bugle blast would mean that they should show themselves; two, that they should be on guard against a rush by the fugitives; three, that they might shoot one flight of arrows to prevent any desperate detachment from breaking through the cordon.

"But you may not shoot to kill," Caswallon ordered. "Hit them in the arms and legs."

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Three blasts repeated was to mean that a fight was on in earnest, but that signal would not be given unless it should prove that the runaways had somehow managed to steal weapons and could not be captured without bloodshed.

It looked like a plan that could hardly fail, but Tros was nervous. For a while he lay still beside Orwic with Gildas beside him, admiring the silence that the ambushed Britons kept. So still they were that rabbits came and nibbled the sweet spring grass almost within arm's reach. But a red fox, scouting for a meal, sniffed once, turned swiftly in his tracks and vanished. Birds, busy with their nesting in tree and thicket, sang as if nothing in the world were wrong, but five fallow does with fawns at foot, on their way to the pool in the hollow to drink, sniffed two or three times at the tainted air, listened and then fled as if a pack of hounds were after them.

It was intuition that made Tros restless. The day was one to make the blood race in the veins—all fair spring weather with the leaves a-budding, blue sky overhead, and underfoot the violets and yellow primroses; scent of wet, brown earth, and bird-song in the air. But Tros' skin tingled while his blood ran sluggish, and the constant picture in his mind—he could not blot it out—was of his ship without a crew.

"I go to look," he whispered, and left Orwic lying prone between two elm trees at one end of the horseshoe shaped ambush. Gildas followed him.

He walked a hundred yards and chose a high tree, climbed it with seaman's skill and from the fork of the highest branches watched the countryside for half-an-hour. At the end of that time, in the middle distance, he could see his stream of fugitives with half-a-dozen stolen horses, densely packed together between the hedgerows of the winding lane that threaded its long way toward the hollow where the ambush waited.

So far, good. He could hardly count them, but it looked as if the whole lot were in one herd, heading straight for the net. They were coming with the desperate, determined, silent haste of tired men who have but one hope and no line of retreat. But why so close together? Why no stragglers for the rearguard to prick forward? No scouts in advance or on the flanks? They might have used the horses for the obviously necessary scout work, but instead, they had put four men on each horse and to the eye, at that distance, there was hardly a square yard visible between their serried ranks from end to end of the procession.

It was Gildas, a branch below Tros, who saw the reason for the dense formation and the grim haste.

"Horsemen!" he said suddenly, and pointed.

Headlong down the hill, beyond the ford, there came a stream of mounted men in hot pursuit, riding like centaurs, scattered, racing to be first to overtake the fugitives—a prize worth spurring for—a third of each slave's value for the captor, and a dozen, an easy bag for one armed, mounted man!

"Pluto!"

Tros came down the tree like a bear shot from below, two branches snapping under him as he took all chances. Gildas dropped to earth beside him. Tros took him by the throat.

"You were their leader! Go to them! Say you have fled from me and are again their leader! Show them a hiding place! Lead them to where the ambush waits, and keep them there at all costs!"

"They will kill me," said Gildas. "They won't believe—"

Tros choked and shook him.

"Do you know what to obey means? Any man can die! That's nothing!"

He let go and Gildas ran. Tros, hardly daring to hope that Gildas could succeed, or that he would even try to succeed, turned and ran at top speed in the opposite direction, flinging himself breathless on the grass beside Orwic.

"Horses!" he panted. "To horse!"

Orwic wanted explanations. Tros, recovering his breath, stood, leaning against a tree and shouted across the hollow to where Caswallon lay beside Fflur.

"Your Lundeners are coming! Get between them and the runaways, or—"

Caswallon's answering shout clipped off the news midword. There was a stir among the brambles, word passed mouth-to-mouth, and then a long cry, ululating from the ambushed bowman who lay nearest to where the horses had been hidden. Ten breadths more and the horses were on the way, ridden and led full-gallop by the charioteers. Sooner than Tros could breathe again evenly, the teams were yoked, and eight-and-twenty chariots wheeled clear of the

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lane toward rising ground, behind which they could make a circuit and arrive unseen behind the rear of the oncoming fugitives.

"They will scatter! I fear they will scatter! How close is the pursuit?" Caswallon asked, leaning forward, fanning the stallions' necks with loose reins.

"On the far side of the Rhyd-y-Cadger bydan."

"How close to it? Can we reach the ford first?"

"You can try!" Tros answered grimly, and Caswallon laughed.

"A hundred men can hold that ford against a thousand! If we get there first, I'll spare you half my men to hunt your runaways!"

THEY ran all risks of being seen and heard, their heads appearing constantly above the shoulder of the rise as Caswallon led the way, forcing his tired stallions to the last strained limit of their strength; Fflur's chariot, lighter than his, but with only two mares, close behind him—and keeping pace. It was likely that she could do more than Caswallon could to check the men of Lunden at the ford without having to draw bow against them.

Dense alders and a heron-haunted swamp between them and the lane served as a luck-given screen exactly at the moment when they passed the fugitives. Tros, standing in the chariot, heard high-pitched voices that sent the herons winging toward their nests in the near-by elms. It was likely enough that Gildas had already reached the fugitives and was in speech with them.

"No need! Never mind the ford!" Tros clutched Caswallon by the shoulder. "Turn around the swamp and come up from behind them. Herd them all into that hollow and surround them until pursuit comes up!"

"Not I!" Caswallon laughed. "I'll try the ford. I want to see how many men can hold it against Cæsar, if he ever comes!"

He shook the reins again and cried out to the stallions, but Tros still clutched his shoulder, shouting in his ear.

"Then give me one chariot. I'll turn back."

Caswallon spared him one swift glance and drew rein, recognizing resolution.

"Jump!" he commanded. Then, glancing overshoulder as the other chariots wheeled right and left to avoid collision, "Orwic, give Tros the last chariot!"

He was away again almost before Tros' feet were on the ground, Fflur hard at his heels and all the other teams but Orwic's in midstride on the instant.

"So!" laughed Orwic, beckoning to Tros to mount beside him. "Mine is the last chariot! Am I then not obedient? You who are to be my captain aboard ship! At the ford down yonder, if Caswallon gets there first, there will only be a fish-wife argument. I would rather be in at the kill. Let me see you manhandle that runaway mob. I believe you can do it alone. And by the way, Tros—" Orwic's almost invaryingly bantering voice changed to a more serious note,—"Caswallon rides hard, but he's only a king, and unless, mind you, unless he can reach that ford in time you'll have your work cut out. The pursuers will scatter around him and come howling for the loot like wolves after a flock of sheep!"

There was a din of voices from the lane where it seemed that Gildas or, at any rate, some one or something had halted the fugitives. The din grew to an angry roar and died, then rose again into a tumult as the march resumed; and a minute or two later the herons flew back to the swamp to hunt frogs.

"Follow them?" asked Orwic.

"No. Make the circuit again and be there by the pool when they come."

The handsome face of Orwic beamed. He foresaw drama, lives of men at stake, his own included; no resource but quick wit and effrontery. He wheeled the team on its haunches, laughed at Tros and then at the charioteer beside him.

Away then, full gallop, toward the tree-surrounded hollow, Tros' eyes studying the approach to it, observing that though men in pursuit of the fugitives might make a wide circuit to outflank Caswallon and win past him, they would nevertheless be obliged to turn into the lane before reaching the hollow in order not to lose time negotiating swamps and thickly wooded, rough ground. There was a neck, where the lane led into the hollow between high banks, through which, inevitably, the pursuit must come.

And, better still, the place looked like a perfect trap from that direction. Bottle-necked, comparatively inaccessible from

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either flank, it was exactly the sort of spot where hunted fugitives would be likely to offer a forlorn resistance. Men in pursuit, possessed of any martial or hunting skill, would hardly dream of entering that gap between the banks without a pause to reconnoiter. Time would be all in Tros, favor.

He checked Orwic when they reached the narrow entrance; stepped down from the chariot.

"Ride you forward," he commanded with a gesture of such confident authority that Orwic grinned. "Ride straight on through the hollow, up the lane on the far side and conceal yourself. There wait. Give me that bugle of yours. So. If I should blow a blast on it, then make as much noise in the bushes as if there were five-and-twenty of you. Shout commands, as if to other chariots, keep out of sight most of the time, but keep moving, showing yourself for a moment at a time, first here, then there.

"It might be well to shoot one arrow, or possibly two or three, provided you hit nobody. Remember, they are weary men, easier to herd than cattle provided they are not terrified beyond all reason. When you have thrashed about sufficiently among the bushes, if they should look like making a concerted rush, then show yourself and shout to them they are surrounded but in safety of their lives if they stay still. Make haste now. Hear them. They come running!"

Orwic vanished at full gallop, leaving deep wheel-ruts on soft earth that already had been crisscrossed by the wheels of five-and-twenty chariots. Tros climbed the bank and hid himself among the trees. The leading fugitives had seen the narrow opening that led to a position they might possibly defend a while, and now the whole two hundred of them poured along the lane at something better than a jogtrot, breathless.

"I am ashamed!" Tros muttered.

He had seldom seen more miserable looking men, not even in the labor gangs of Egypt. White skins heightened incongruity. Fed healthiness increased the horror of despair. They were armed with sharpened sticks, scythes stolen from the farms they passed, a few tools such as hammers stolen from the shipyard, and here and there a knife thong-fastened to a pole. They were footsore; nine out of ten of them limped; and because Tros had clothed them all alike in smocks and leather jackets, and none had had hair or beard trimmed since the building of the ship began, they appeared to belong to one drab brotherhood of wild-eyed fear.

"HOW shall a man make men of them?" Tros wondered. Yet, because they had been well fed and had worked hard, they were stronger than the ordinary run of men. There was no lack there of stature or of muscle.

Gildas was in their midst, not bound or hurt, but evidently captive. Four or five inches taller than the men who crowded in on him, alone of them all clothed in a free man's breeches and fur-trimmed coat, he had what they lacked—freedom from within. Obviously he had not succeeded in convincing them that he had left earned freedom to throw in his lot once more with hunted rebels; there were sharp sticks pointed at his back; a scythe swayed too suggestively within an arm's length of his face.

As plain to see as if words told it, they had threatened him with death if his tale should turn out to be false. But he looked like a man in danger, not a hunted slave. His eyes glanced left and right for a sight of Tros, but Tros did not leave his hiding place among the trees until the last man limped into the hollow and he could hear the splashing as they bathed their lame feet in the pool.

"Zeus! But they are beaten men!" he muttered.

They had posted no scouts to give warning of pursuit. Instead of setting men in ambush at the narrow entrance, they were arguing, holding a crows' congress by the pool, perhaps condemning Gildas. There was angry shouting, but Tros could not catch the words. He began to wonder how to rescue Gildas, being minded not to lose a promising lieutenant, but he could think of no way at the moment without adding to Gildas' danger and risking a rush by the slaves for the open.

At last he heard Gildas' voice in masterful appeal, bold, loud and with a note of mockery:

"What do I care whether I am killed or not! You idiots! Set a guard there at the entrance! If I were the Lord Tros, and caught you maa-ing like sheep that smell

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wolves, I would hang you for crow meat! You have one hope! Hold this place until the Lord Tros rescues you! Punish you for running? Yes, of course he will, and soundly, or I don't know him! But if I were he, I would whip the slave to death who let himself be caught and ransomed rather than make the best of failure and restore himself to his master without expense! Kill me if you like, you fools! I will die free, which is more than any of you will do! I warn you, the Lord Tros loves a man who loses handsomely. Set a guard there by the entrance and defend yourselves until the Lord Tros comes!"

The answer to that was a babel of long argument, of which Tros could not distinguish anything. The upshot of it was, that presently a company of thirty men with knives and sharpened stakes came trudging out of the hollow and sat down in two rows straight across the narrowest neck of the lane, their lines extending up the bank of either side of it. The man in the center of the front rank had a bow and half-a-dozen arrows; being better armed, he seemed to have assumed the leadership.

Tros, bugle in his left hand, leaving his right arm free to use his long sword, but not drawing it, retreated from the shelter of the trees and made a circuit, reaching the lane where a bulge in the bank projected just sufficiently to hide him. Very cautiously he peered around the edge of that and watched until the thirty men became engaged in argument, their eyes on one another. Then, in three strides, he was in the middle of the lane, fists on his hips, feet spread apart, his lion's eyes a-laugh and strong teeth showing in a grin that knew fear too well to yield to it at any time. They saw him suddenly, and nine-and-twenty of them froze with fear.

"Put that down!" he ordered.

The man in the midst had drawn bow, arrow to his ear.

"Lay down your weapons! You fools! You know the penalty for slaves in arms!"

He began to stride toward them, conscious of the sword against his left hip, but not moving his right hand toward it; in no hurry, and yet not slowly, aware that the light in the notch of the lane at his back made him a perfect target.

The bowman hesitated. It was the man to his right beside him who struck the bow upward at the moment when he loosed the arrow. It whined in a parabola ten feet in air above Tros' head.

Tros kicked the bow out of his hand, then kicked him hard under the chin and sent him sprawling; seized a sharpened stake and thrashed him with it until the crimson bruises swelled from head to heel.

Then when the writhing wretch had no more breath to sob with as he bit the muddied turf, Tros strode ten paces farther up the lane and turned to face the others.

"I said, lay your weapons down! No bargains! Lay them down! You are surrounded. You—" he pointed at the nearest man— "go and tell Gildas to come here!"

The man threw down his knife and ran to carry out the order. Tros paused to give him time, then, when he heard him blurting out the news, blew a long blast on the bugle. It was answered instantly by shouts from Orwic and the crashing and plunging of a chariot in the undergrowth on the far side of the hollow. Orwic had divided forces, for his shouts were answered from a distance by the charioteer. There came a noise from beside the pool as if a hundred bee-hives had been overturned, then a cry from one throat—

"Mercy!"

Orwic answered it. Tros had a mental picture of him, standing in his peaked steel cap between two elm trees, laughing as he leaned to peer down at the frightened mob.

"Throw down your weapons! Ho there, archers! Shoot if they refuse! Wait! Wait! They obey! Throw up your hands! All of you! Archers! Shoot any man who holds a weapon!"

An arrow whined across the hollow and went plunk into a tree.

"Mercy!"

It was a hundred voices this time, followed by Orwic's boyish laugh.

Tros turned to face another problem. There were horsemen coming full pelt up the lane from the direction of the ford by Teddington. As Gildas reached his side he turned and strode along the lane to meet them, standing hands on hips exactly where the fellow with the bow had taken aim at him.

"IT WAS the bugle-note that saved me!" Gildas laughed. "They had a noose all tied to hang me by! Some brigth one had suggested that if they should hang me they could blame me afterward for having

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tempted them to run away! They are beaten men, Lord Tros. There is neither fight nor run left in them."

"Aye, but there is fight in these!" Tros answered, screwing up his eyes to scan the faces of a dozen horsemen who had drawn rein where the lane began to narrow, nearly a hundred yards away, and were discussing the situation. Several of them had dismounted and were examining their horses' legs, scraping the muddy sweat off them with cupped hands. It was a minute or two before they realized who Tros was, because the shadow of the high bank fell across the lane. Then one man shouted to him:

"Hah! Then we are in time, Lord Tros! We hunt your slaves. We rode far on a false scent, but your man Skell rode after us and clapped us on the right one. Skell ought to be rewarded. Caswallon, it seems, wants the slaves to escape! He is blocking the ford against all comers, but we swam the stream. The slaves can't be far ahead. Have you a horse?"

"I have the slaves and five-and-twenty chariots!" Tros answered. "I thank you for your courtesy, but I need no help."

The men began to ride up-lane toward him, each clutching his weapon in constrained, ill-omened silence. They had come well equipped for a man hunt—swords, spears, bows and arrows, rope. They halted again ten yards away, and Gildas picked up one of the long knives a slave had dropped. Tros recognized one of the horsemen, Rhys, a member of Caswallon's council.

"I stand by," Gildas remarked in a low voice.

"Lord Tros," said the man in the lead, and hesitated, not glancing to the right or left but, as it were, feeling for his men's support. He was red-eyed from exertion—a big lean fellow with a mass of reddish hair, a long nose and high cheek-bones, on a horse whose legs trembled from weariness. "You shall pay me for this day's effort! We were a-horse before dawn. We have ridden the noon out, all for your sake."

"Not on my invitation," Tros retorted, keeping his right hand well away from the projecting sword-hilt. "Gildas, get behind me!" he whispered. "Keep your weapon out of sight!"

"Lord Tros, that is a lie! Your man Skell came and clapped us on the scent."

"Not with my authority," said Tros.

"He is your slave, isn't he? For what he does, you answer. It is not our fault if he is ill-trained. You say, you have caught your slaves. Where are they?"

"Safe," said Tros.

"Well, I am a reasonable man."

The red-haired, thin-nosed nobleman glanced right and left at last, took stock of his companions, and went on—

"Pay me half the proper ransom-money and I will cry quits!"

Tros laughed. He always did laugh when the odds were all against him and demands were made to which he was determined not to yield. Sometimes that volcanic, dry bark bursting from his chest disarmed an adversary's will. Not always.

"Easy to laugh!" said the other, growing truculent. "I doubt that story of the five-and-twenty chariots! See—" he drew the other men's attention—"here are the wheel-marks of a score or so proceeding this way, and but one returning. If anybody asked me, I would say those are Caswallon's chariots, and we know where he is." He turned to the others. "This looks like a scurvy trick to me. He and his friend Caswallon and Mygnach's daughter Fflur propose to cheat us of our dues! However, he tries to cheat the wrong man. We will flush that covert and enjoy some profitable hunting after our long ride!"

Rhys jerked the spear free from its sling behind his shoulder and made two or three practise passes with it, with its point in Tros' direction. But Tros still kept his hand away from the projecting sword-hilt. He did not dare to blow the bugle yet, because Orwic might interpret that into a signal to use violence on the slaves. Nor did he propose, if it could be helped, to fight a member of the council. He had a perfect right to protect himself and his human property if he could do it, but the slaves had been proscribed by general alarm as runaways, and the obviously profitable thing for Rhys to do was to chase the slaves into the open, where he could round them up and claim redemption money. Rhys turned to his companions.

"Better make haste," he remarked. "There will be others presently. Why share the profit? You four keep his lordship occupied! The rest of us will ride in!"

Tros drew his sword at last, a thing he never did unless he meant to use it. And he said nothing, which was another of his

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characteristics in extremity. His silence, more than any speech he might have made, gave the opponents pause. Rhys laughed unpleasantly.

"Hold him here, four of you. The rest of you follow me!"

He began to wheel his trembling horse, and Tros made up his mind to retreat to the pool, where the slaves would be all around him, so that afterward he would be able to assert they were under control and, if he should slay any one, he would be able to claim he did so in defence of them. But as he took one short step backward he heard a yell behind him. Thunder of hoofs and wheels came, not along the lane but down the bank-side like an avalanche. He and Gildas sprang to the opposite bank in the nick of time. Orwic, one foot on the chariot-front, the reins in both hands, made his frantic team leap as they were six feet from the bottom, preserving them from a fall beneath the chariot by a trick of horsemanship so near to magic as to make Tros gasp, wheeled them down the middle of the lane before they could lose impetus, and charged headlong at the twelve who blocked the way.

DOWN they went, horse and rider, in a shouting, blasphemous confusion, Orwic avalanching through the midst and struggling for fifty yards or more to rein in the frantic team. Before he could turn some of the riders were on their feet, clustering together, looking the wrong way, expecting another chariot. Three horses were too badly injured to get up, others had bolted. Before the riders had time to collect their wits and scatter Orwic was coming again headlong. A horse's shoulder knocked the Lord Rhys stunned against the bank; the others, leaping right and left, avoided wheels by inches.

"Run!" laughed Orwic. "Run before I signal!"

He leaned out of the chariot, beckoning to Tros to pass the bugle to him, held it to his lips and filled his lungs. But they did not wait to find out whether a bugle signal would bring reenforcements; they took the threat for granted, cried, "Hold! Enough!" and ran to catch their horses.

"Home! Home with you!" Orwic shouted. "Get you home before I name you and lay charges!"

Then he stepped out of the chariot and took the stunned man by the hair, discovered he was conscious, shook him, dragged him to his feet, shook him again and kicked him down the lane toward his friends.

"Better let me forget who you are!" he called after him and turning to examine the injured horses, drew his sword across their throats.

"You may have to pay for three horses, brother Tros," he remarked, wiping his sword as he strolled back. "That would be an act of generosity that should draw Rhys' teeth. And I wager he won't talk! But if you had killed Rhys or his men, Ludd love you! Not even Fflur could have saved you from indemnities that would have cost you half the tin from off your ship."

Tros stepped into the chariot and they drove slowly to the pool to count the slaves. There were only four men missing, of whom one, they said, was drowned when they crossed the river, and three, losing heart, had returned to the shipyard.

"I will sell those three!" said Tros. "They are not slaves, they are animals. Nay, I will not even sell them, I will give them in exchange for those three horses that were overthrown just now and injured! Gildas, take some men and skin me those three horses. Cut the meat up, have it cooked, and feed these rascals or I'll never get them home!"

He asked no further questions, made no inquiries as to who the ringleaders might be, threatened no punishments, intended none. He and Orwic strolled together, arm-in-arm beside the pool, Tros praising Orwic's horsemanship and Orwic trying to talk of anything else under the sun because the subject of his own achievements bored him.

"I suppose," said Orwic, "you will have to have these poor fools flogged?"

"Not I!" Tros answered with his great full-chested laugh. "I no more flog a man who has his belly full of grief than you flog a foundered horse. I am rather pleased with them. See how they stuck together! And only three faint-hearted ones among the lot! Those three discovered and all ready to be weeded out before I set sail! Hah! I begin to believe I shall have a fair crew after all."

"But have you enough yet?"

"No, not by a hundred men. And I have one who will make more trouble for me than the hundred that I lack! Yet I can not get rid of Skell, for I have promised him a chance to prove himself. Hey! What a

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fool a man is with his promises! Look you. Skell is nine days out of prison, where I put him for treason as black as the inside of a tar pot. He inclines now toward honesty, being one of those teetering —— built like an Antioch scale, with manliness at one end of the balance-arm and false weights at the other. Intending me a good turn, he claps the men of Lunden on the trail of these runaways and all but costs me a fortune. And that's nothing to what he's likely to do when fortune finds him opportunity in some foreign port! What shall I do with the fool? Lord Zeus, what shall I do with him!"

"Send him to Cæsar!" said Orwic. "He might serve as well as a woman to break Cæsar's wheels."

To his surprize, Tros took the suggestion seriously, pacing up and down, both hands behind him now, turning over in his mind the pros and cons of it. He was still meditating, frowning when Caswallon came with a fresh team he had appropriated somewhere, laughing, confident, Tros' problems out of mind because of a brand new solution for his own.

"Tros, brother Tros!" he shouted, "I have Cæsar by the horns!" Drawing rein, he leaned out of the chariot and took Tros by the shoulder. "Let him come!" he said, with one of his confident nods. "That ford by Cadgerbydan* shall be the battleground, for I have seen now how to hold it. I will drive stakes in the river-bed. Then we will tempt Cæsar inland, away from the coast and reenforcements, harrying his legions all the way with horse and chariot, opposing him enough in front to keep him occupied and out of reach of Lunden until we check him at the ford by Cadgerbydan with half his legionaries drowning and our own men charging downhill from his rear to cut off his retreat. Let him come! We have Cæsar beaten!"†

## CHAPTER V

### A BARGAIN WITH THE DRUIDS

TROUBLES increased as the day drew near that Tros had set long in advance for the launching. He had hoped, by making that a popular spectacle, to win the public to his side and, perhaps, to recruit a score or two of freemen for his crew by exciting admiration, curiosity and those other emotions that stir men to act on the spur of a moment.

Nothing had he left undone to make the event spectacular, even as he had overlooked no element of danger that could be foreseen. The ways, down which the ship must slide, had been reenforced and, in places, even shored with masonry. He had anchors buried deep on shore and prodigiously heavy flaxen cables to prevent the ship, when launched, from gliding too far across the river.

To make sure the ship would start when he gave the signal, he had set a turn-screw in position, by which he could raise the huge balks of timber on which the bow end rested, thus increasing the slant to overcome inertia. And he had greased the ways so thickly with good hog fat that even his friend Caswallon complained of the extravagance.

The ship rested in a cradle made of elm, so there was no risk that friction would strip off the tin from her undersides. Sigurdsen had spent a whole day taking soundings in the river bed to make sure there was no submerged wrecks or obstructions in the stream. At all strategic points within the yard Tros had secretly placed quantities of his appalling chemical, with instructions to Conops to fire it if the crowd of spectators should unexpectedly turn riotous.

But more than any physical precaution that he took, acceptance by the Druids of his invitation to be present and to bless the ship was Tros' chief guarantee of a successful launching. He would have preferred to leave the Druids out of it. Having extorted pearls from them, he was conscious of their resentment, and he preferred the ill-will of men less practised than the Druids in the art of making thought produce results. He had too much experience of priests in Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem and elsewhere not to know that the preliminary steps of decadence destroy all vision and the power to do good, but do not for a while destroy the energy itself or its accumulated impetus. Men who can not do good, do evil. He would have been almost as pleased with the Druids' curse, just then, as with their blessing.

But an undiscoverable enemy set rumor stirring. It was whispered, then repeated

*Teddington. The word means battle chariots.

†This is the actual strategy that Caswallon did eventually use. There were stakes in the "ford by Cadgerbydan," i.e. Teddington, as recently as thirty years ago. The plan succeeded until Caswallon's own men ran and his allies deserted him; but even so, Cæsar won no more than a "Pyrrhic" victory.

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in the market place, that Tros intended to perform a human sacrifice before the launching, in order that the ship might have a soul and be superior to other ships. From mouth to mouth the tale waxed circumstantial. He would bind a living slave across the ways and let the ship slide over him, drowning the victim's screams with a fanfare of trumpets and salvo of war-drums. Representations were made to the king and council that the superstitious cruelty should be prevented.

The council in full session sent for Tros, who, arms akimbo, laughing angrily, repudiated any suggestion of sacrifice of any sort whatever.

"Lord Caswallon—noblemen!" he snorted in disgust, "I hold myself inferior in all things to the meanest of the gods, and I would shudder at the thought of cruelty to win my favor! What then is it likely that the gods would think? I would forever count myself an exile from the company of all that host of spiritual beings who surround us and enjoy our manhood; whose very breath is inspiration to the brave, if I should tolerate a human sacrifice. If I should perpetrate it, I would say, 'My soul has left me. Henceforth I am no man, no animal, a thing!' "

But one member of the council was the Lord Rhys, who smarted from a previous attempt to pull Tros' purse-strings. Rich from impeaching law-breakers and buying up their property when they must sell to pay the heavy fines imposed, who was not to be decoyed by spiritual herrings drawn across a chance to profit by another man's predicament. He already had one issue against Tros. The hope he might be bribed, lurked in his cold eyes as he leaned forward and, without rising, pointed an accusing forefinger, used it to knock off a drop from the end of his nose, and then pointed again.

"The Lord Tros speaks with much assurance about gods, of whom he affects to know a great deal. But we all know that human sacrifice has been made before now at the launching of ships, by men who think more of their own superstitions than of the law and the opinions of decent people. Such men invariably hide their evil practises and deny them after the event. It happens I have seen the ship, which is a monster and not like any ship previously built. Not only is it plated underneath with precious metal of a value greater than a whole year's taxes from my district, but there is a golden serpent having two tails, one of which coils the full length of the ship on either side until they reach the stern, where they are joined together and project into the air. We all know that the use of snakes by anybody but the Druids is a blasphemy, and I have this to add—"

Rhys paused, stood up, made a gesture toward Caswallon and the council, watched Tros for the space of a dozen breaths with eyes that glittered coldly and resumed:

"That serpent's head curves upward from the ship's bow. It has a long tongue that projects and moves. It has eyes that are made of garnets. It has teeth that were taken from wild boars. And beneath it, at the ship's bow, there is the figure of a woman, carved by Cunobeline the minstrel, of the full size of a woman, painted blue but with the face pearl-colored, of crushed oyster-shell, the long hair golden and the head crowned. Unless rumor lies, the hair and the crown are both of solid gold. There are gold rings on the woman's fingers, that are folded on her breast.

"Now I accuse the Lord Tros of intending—mark you, I say, of intending—I do not say he has done so yet, though I reserve my full right to my own convictions—I say, of intending to incorporate a woman's soul into that figure of wood and metal!

"Why else should he tempt Cunobeline the minstrel to commit such sacrilege as to carve a human figure?* Why did he set free Boad, who was serving maid to his own wife Helma, unless because he wished to sacrifice a free-woman rather than a slave? Where is Boad?"

Rhys sat down, brushing a new drop from his nose-end with his sleeve, and there was a murmur. Men nodded their heads, at which Caswallon on the throne-chair chewed his long mustache. It was true, and all men knew it; Boad had mysteriously vanished.

TROS took two steps forward, so that he faced the semicircle and Caswallon in the midst. He was about to speak when Orwic, at Caswallon's right hand, put a word in.

"I accuse Rhys himself of having made away with Boad!"

Orwic crossed one leg over the other and

*The Britons made no use of the human form in their designs which, however, were of a very high artistic standard.

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leaned back in the carved and painted chair as if he thought the whole discussion a mere nuisance. Before Rhys could spring to his feet indignantly, with a bored air he had tossed another brand into the blaze.

"We all know how Rhys grew rich!"

Rhys stuttered indignation, stood up and sat down again. There fell an awkward silence, broken after a pause by Orwic's lazily amused voice:

"Rhys' may fight me, if he dares!"

Then Tros, his face alight with sudden comprehension and assurance:

"Nay! That is my privilege! I know now why a slave came hinting to me that I might do well to go and visit the Lord Rhys by night! The slave, I remember, suggested I should bring no witnesses! So! I will give the Lord Rhys until sunset to produce Boad, my freed woman, alive and unhurt. If he should fail—"

But Rhys had left the council hall, slipping out behind his high-backed chair into the shadow and passing through the leather-curtained door into the vestibule where armed men saluted him with grounded spear butts.

"Noblemen," said Tros, "I lost a young wife, through taking your part against Cæsar. I have claimed no recompense from you on that account, and as for Cæsar, he shall settle his own reckoning. I hired Cunobeline, the minstrel, who was taught in Gaul by Agoras, the Greek, to carve me a true likeness of my young wife for the ship's bow. So, it may be, neither ship nor I will act unworthy of her memory. Now you have heard the whole of it."

But though they had heard and believed, they were shocked by the idea of a carving of a woman. Rhys sent Boad to the shipyard before evening, but she brought a husband with her, who frowned her into silence, and who was so obviously a spy in Rhys' service that Tros turned both of them out into the rainy night. He might have canceled the girl's marriage had he chosen. As a freed woman, she was his ward and none might marry her without his leave. But he was heartily glad to be rid of the wench and gave her a sound boxing of the ears for marriage portion. So she went off and lied about him, claiming he had tried to exercise the age-old tyranny—and she already three weeks married.

That brought into play druidic prejudice. He went to see the Druids to invite them to the launching, and a middle-aged Lord-Druid, recently promoted from the lower rank in the shuffle that had followed the death of the great Taliesan, took opportunity to lecture him on moral laxity, saying the Druids could not countenance such practises or grant official recognition to a man suspected of them.

"For what will become of Britain, if we encourage strangers who do such things in our midst?"

But Tros knew he must have the Druids at the ceremony, or risk disaster. There were too many men who would enjoy the opportunity to start a riot unless the launching should have druidic sanction.

"You shall come!" he retorted. "You are not such spiritual guides as was your teacher, the great Taliesan, or I would not dare speak to you in these terms. You are not men who possess the vision, or you would know that this woman's tale about me is a lie—as the great Lord-Druid Taliesan would certainly have known without my telling him. He had knowledge, but not you! I say to you, you shall come!"

"I will curse you!" the gray beard answered." But the threat did not have the same effect on Tros that it would have produced on a native Celt—even on Orwic or Caswallon. Tros smiled and bowed with dignity more gracious than the Druid's.

"I have seen curses," he answered, "that returned like bad money to the forger! Curse carefully, Lord-brother of the dragons! If Taliesan had cursed me, I should be a dead man now. But he blessed. You will come and bless my ship, and for this reason: That if you do not, I will take those pearls and, letting all men know who gave them to me, I will scatter them by the handful into the River Thames as my ship takes water. And I will say, 'Lo! These are Druids' pearls, a Druid's blessing!' "

Eyes met, and the Druid knew that Tros was willful enough to carry out that threat.

"Then," Tros continued, speaking slowly, "having no pearls, but having returned them to the water whence they came, I would not be under obligation to you. I would suit myself what action I should undertake next."

Taliesan the Great would have made short work of such a threat. But Tros knew he was dealing with no Taliesan. It was an ambitious, weak-willed hierarchy that had yielded to demands for treasure in

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the first place. Such were not the men to stand their ground and see wealth wasted, this old rumor-monger—this repeater of a slave-girl's accusations, least of all.

"Your heart is bold and bad, Lord Tros," the Druid answered. "But the evil dig their own pit. It is best we speed your going and soon see the last of you."

"Taliesan would never have made such a speech in my hearing," Tros answered.

More than ever he recognized weakness. He had built a ship, had drilled the odds and ends of flotsam of humanity into a crew of sorts, and knew that weakness is no good for a foundation. Unless discarded altogether, weakness must be beaten, pressed, hammered and backed up until it resists at last, and either breaks or is good for something.

"I am your ally," he went on, his amber eyes scanning their countenances that were stern but only masked irresolution. "Ye are willing to make use of me, but not to treat me as your friend. Now Taliesan, had he deigned to make use of me, would have reckoned my well being as important as his own. He would never have sent me forth without a full crew. He would have manned my ship with kings' sons, had I asked him. Nor would he have prayed to see the last of me. Taliesan would have said one of two things to me. Either, 'Thy heart is bad, so get thee hence!' or, 'How can I serve thee, thou who servest us?' And I would have asked him for a hundred freemen, ten from each of ten tribes, to increase my crew. Where is the cloak of Taliesan? Who wears it?"

His speech was received in silence. They withdrew into a corner to consult in whispers—nine gray-bearded men possessed of all the outer attributes of dignity, but with its cause lost. They did not know, they thought; they guessed; they were enamored of their own importance; they were echoes of a wisdom that had flowed through Taliesan but that did not penetrate beneath the crust of their ambition to be powerful.

"We must send to Mona,"* the Lord Druid said at last. "Mona is the seat of our authority."

Tros struck his own breast. "Mine is in my heart!" he answered. "So was the Lord Taliesan's. He would have said to me yes or no. He would have given me a crew of Druids had he seen fit! And if he had sent a messenger to Mona or any other place, it would have been to say what he had done, not to ask whether it were right for him to do it! Speak ye your own minds. I listen."

So again they whispered in the corner, shaking heads and glancing at him where he stood in the dim whale-oil lantern-light, Tros realizing more and more, as they delayed to answer him, that something—though he could not guess what—had happened to provide him with an upper hand over them.

"They would like me dead!" he told himself. "Yet they love their holiness too much to cause me to be slain."

Decaying priesthoods, well he knew, are desperate and justify all evil done to prop up their own despotism. But he knew, too, decadence takes time. Great Taliesan was hardly three months dead; Druids would hardly stoop to doing murder or procuring it until a score or so of years should overlie his influence.

"THEY have news. If I wait and persist, I will learn it," he assured himself. "They wish me gone. They are afraid of me. They dare not to offend me too much. Why?" he wondered, and he folded his arms, standing very erect, to await what the gods should bring forth.

"I see destiny in travail," he reflected.

Presently the new Lord Druid came toward him, fingering the golden sickle at his waist. The lamp light shone on the yellow metal and on the Druid's eyes, that were mild enough and not grown worldly, but betrayed doubt where there should have been assurance, built on inner strength. But instead of assurance there was arrogance of glance and gesture; and instead of strength there was ambition to appear strong.

"There are mysteries you may not know," he said, stroking his long beard.

"I can read your heart," Tros answered, and his hands were still.

He was like a rock, whereas the Druid came at him like water feeling for a line of least resistance.

"But if we trust you with a secret—"

"That you will not do," Tros interrupted. "You know as well as I, that whoever tells a secret cannot expect another man to keep it. Therefore, whatever you will tell me,

*The modern Anglesea.

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you will have decided first is not a real secret, but only something with which to mystify me. Speak. I listen."

"You remember King Gwenwynwyn of the Ordovici?"

The Druid's white hand continued stroking at his beard as he watched Tros' eyes. All Britain knew that Tros and King Gwenwynwyn of the withered arm were enemies. They had quarreled when they first met, even in the presence of the mighty Taliesan, by instinct as deadly enemies as two dog-wolves that meet, sniff once and snarl. But the lamp light showed no change in Tros' expression; he fell alertly, instantly on guard, but on the surface his frown dissolved into a fighting smile too slowly to be observed.

"Gwenwynwyn," said the Druid, "went to Gaul and has returned. Gwenwynwyn spoke with Cæsar, who has pledged him friendship. Cæsar set a price on your head of three Roman talents, and Gwenwynwyn will offer the third of that to whoever shall kill you and bring your head to him."

"My head is worth more than three talents to Cæsar," Tros answered with a gruff laugh. "Gwenwynwyn should have made a better bargain!"

He was studying the Druid's face now with all his power of intuition keyed up to the limit of alertness, although on the surface he was perfectly unruffled. It was not the news that puzzled him. To set a big price on his head was Cæsar's obvious recourse, and since his first success against Cæsar he had expected that. He had been absolutely sure of it since he and Caswallon took Cæsar captive and exchanged him against Fflur. But it was beyond his power to guess why the Druids should reveal the information to him now.

"What you tell is not news to me. Why do you tell it?" he answered.

The Druid smiled with an air of superior knowledge—not as the great Taliesan would have smiled, for Taliesan took no delight in knowing more than other men.

"Gwenwynwyn has no army," he said, fingering the sickle at his waist. "But he is Cæsar's friend, and Cæsar has an army."

Tros let out one of his deep-chested monosyllabic laughs. "At Verulam," he said, "where I met Gwenwynwyn, he accused Caswallon of being Cæsar's friend and tried to persuade Taliesan to rebuke Caswallon for it."

The Druid made a gesture of indifference, suggesting that Gwenwynwyn's treacheries were nothing new.

"Gwenwynwyn has no army," he repeated, "and he lives afar off in the west. He is afraid if he should murder you or cause you to be murdered, he would have to meet Caswallon's vengeance, for he knows Caswallon is your friend. It would be hard for Caswallon to march all the width of Britain with an army to attack him, but he knows Caswallon's energy in action just as surely as he knows his carelessness in repose. So he has made a stipulation to which Cæsar has agreed."

The Druid paused and eyed Tros curiously. All the other Druids gathered nearer, making no sound. They were like disembodied spirits, bearded faces framed in shadow.

"Cæsar is to send five hundred Spaniards to Gwenwynwyn's aid! They are to land in Dyvnaint* and to march to Merioneth.† They will be commanded by a Roman, but they are to obey Gwenwynwyn, whom they will defend if you should be slain and Caswallon should try to avenge you."

The Druid paused again, drew in his breath and sighed.

"So you see, Lord Tros, you have brought invasion on us. You have brought on us the curse of foreign soldiers in our midst. Civil war may follow."

"But?" said Tros. "I can discern a 'but' that lurks—to be discovered presently! What is it? Butt it forth!"

"The Spaniards have not yet started. To send them will cost Cæsar money. If either of two events should happen, Cæsar might not send those men."

"Aye," Tros answered, nodding, "if I were dead and Cæsar knew it, he might not send them. What is the other alternative?"

"If you were gone, and Cæsar knew it—Go soon! Go soon, Lord Tros, and leave us to our own peace!"

Tros threw back his head and laughed.

"Nay, I will not go!" he retorted. "Nay, nay! Hah!" He began to pace the floor, both hands behind him, knotted fingers clenching and unclenching. "Five hundred men!" he muttered.

He had the news at last! Suddenly he turned and faced the Druids.

"I will bargain with you!"

The Lord Druid appeared horrified. A

*Cornwall or Devonshire.

†The only county in England or Wales that retains its ancient British name.

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blunt proposal to drive bargains was an insult to druidic dignity. Not yet, surely not yet, had they descended to such depths that they might not cover bargaining beneath a gloss of condescension. Nevertheless, beneath the horror Tros saw readiness to drive a bargain, should the terms of it appeal.

"We give or we withhold," the Druid answered. "He who wears the golden sickle neither buys nor sells."

Tros made a gesture of concession. He would not split hairs of definition. He came bluntly to the point.

"I will go, and as soon as may be. I will make no more demands on you. But you shall keep my going secret. You shall tell Gwenwynwyn I will not go. You shall tell him—and no untruth, for you hear me threaten now—that you have heard me boast I will explore the coast of Britain in my ship, until I come to Merioneth where withered-arm Gwenwynwyn kings it in the woods! You shall take no steps to keep those Spaniards from coming. You shall leave that business to me. And meanwhile, you shall guard my life. You shall bless me publicly, that men may know I am not lightly to be murdered.

"You shall lend me countenance by coming to the launching of my ship with ceremonial procession and the minstrels and a choir. And if I send a man to Gaul," Tros added, with one of those swift afterthoughts that often mean more than the whole of what preceded them, "you shall give him secret introduction to the Gauls, to the end that they may help him to spy on Cæsar. That is all. Now, play the Taliesan for once! Say yes or say no. Say it only like men, that I may count with or without you."

The Druids went again into a conference, whispering together where the darkest shadow fell beyond the heaped-up sacks of grain. Tros paced the floor, no longer thinking of the Druids, knowing, because he understood their dread of foreign soldiers, that their answer would be yes.

"Five hundred men!" he muttered. "And Skell anxious to redeem himself! Hah!"

## CHAPTER VI

### LIAFAIL

IT WAS not yet dawn. Tros, sword on the table in front of him, sat by the fireside in darkness except for the flickering fire on the hearth and, the night being gusty, the room was filled with smoke that spread itself in layers. Conops, squatting by the hearth, baked bread for breakfast. Skell stood and faced Tros, eyes watering in the stinging smoke, and both men coughed at intervals.

"You are a fool," said Tros, "and an irksome problem to me. When you were my enemy, I laughed, but now I grieve because a fool is a danger to his friends and deadlier yet to his master."

"Lord Tros, you sent for me," Skell answered, shivering, for he was only half-clothed. "I think you did not send for me at this hour to call names or because sleep fails you. I take it, you will use my folly. I am willing."

Tros crashed the table with his fist and made the sword jump.

"Idiot! You cost me three men recently by giving the alarm when all my Britons bolted in the night. I had to swap three in exchange for three slain horses. Another year of your loyalty—and I am beggared!"

"Not so bad as that, Lord Tros! I saved all the stores. It was I who found the fire laid under the pitch-shed floor. I saved you nearly half-a-mile of hempen rope by—"

"Can you speak the Roman tongue?" Tros interupted.

"Yes, my lord."

"And Gaulish?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Cæsar and many of his officers could recognize you?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then shave!"

Skell stared, but Conops found a razor and a pair of shears. Before Skell realized it, half his beard was gone.

"There, take the bacon rind and rub," said Conops irritably. "Rub it in well, unless you want your skin to be scraped off with the hair." Conops shoved to make him turn the unclipped half toward the firelight. "Spit on the rind! If it's too hard, chew it!"

Tros, in silence, watched the transformation. What had looked like obstinacy through the matted red mask now betrayed itself as a retreating chin accentuated by the big sharp nose. Skell looked ten years younger, and by ten of any measure less a danger to be reckoned with. By some trick of proportion now, his eyes looked much less cunning and more mild. Tros ordered Conops to trim the eyebrows.

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"Not too much or he'll look disguised," he warned. "Now the hair at the back of the neck. Crop it half short."

Skell went and washed his face in the great lead bowl in the corner. Luckily he could not see himself, or the last dregs of his self-esteem would have drifted away with the smoke as Conops opened the shutters a trifle to judge what time it might be. Tros had to screw up his own courage before he could trust that weak-chinned specimen with any kind of mission. However, he had none else suited for his purpose. Gildas, for instance, knew no Roman.

"At any rate, Cæsar won't fear you," he remarked, as Skell returned to stand in front of him. "Are you afraid of Cæsar?"

"Aye!" said Skell, showing too much of the whites of his eyes.

Tros laughed. "A month ago you would have boasted that neither Cæsar nor any other man could frighten you! Because I am not afraid of Cæsar, I will send you to him."

Skell's jaw fell, increasing the effect of the retreating chin. His red-rimmed eyes grew narrower. Conops, heaping red hot ashes on a bread pan, chuckled.

"Aye, I know," said Tros, nodding. "When I sent you to Cæsar before, you played fast and loose between him and me. He will scourge and crucify you if you are recognized. But you asked me for a chance to act the man, and now you have it. I am going to give you money, my money, and this from the Druids."

Tros showed him a fragment of parchment, not longer than a thumb joint either way, inscribed with heavy characters in black ink.

"If Romans should see this they would condemn you to death for possessing it. So swallow it if you are caught. But show it to any Gaul and, if he is a true Gaul, he will help you. You are to discover from which port, and when Cæsar is sending Spanish troops to Britain. By whatever means present themselves, you are to get exact information to me. Without betraying who you are or even that you know me, you are to start a rumor in Gaul in such way that it will reach Cæsar's ears as soon as possible, that I will remain in Britain all this year in order to help Caswallon against Cæsar should he attempt a new invasion."

"Am I myself to return to you with the information?" Skell asked.

"That is for the gods and your own wit to determine. I need the information more than I need you. You may return by fishing boat from Gaul or you may attach yourself to the Spanish troops and sail with them. They might need an interpreter, for instance."

"And how shall I reach Gaul?" Skell asked him.

"By chariot to Pevensey, where you will find a fisherman named Geraint who will take you to the Gaulish coast not far from Seine mouth. You will only need to show him this Druids' writing and he will obey you. Geraint, they tell me, is half Gaul, half Briton. He will remain over there in Gaul among the fisherfolk, and it may be he is the man to bring you back or to bring your news to me if you remain and travel with the troops. But he is not too trustworthy, since he loves the glint of money. I was cautioned by the Druids as to that. So, if you use Geraint, he must not understand what he is doing. Nothing in writing. Nothing spoken that he could repeat to the Romans or to a Roman spy."

Conops chuckled again stirring cow's milk as he warmed it in the embers. Then he cracked six eggs into a frying pan and threw the shells into the fire with totally unnecessary violence. Tros nodded.

"Eggs," he said. "If Geraint or any other man from Gaul should bring me eggs, no Roman could interpret that. If he should say they are the eggs of Spanish hens from Seine mouth or from Caritia or from Caen or from Coriallum*, as the case may be, I would understand that the Spanish troops will sail from whichever port is thus indicated. Let each egg represent a day. Thus, if there were nine eggs, I would understand that the Spaniards will sail on the ninth day after the messenger set forth from Gaul.

"Then you must tell me in how many ships they sail. So, lest the eggs be broken, you will wrap them carefully. If in three packages, then the Spaniards will sail in three ships. If in two, then in two ships. If each egg should be separately wrapped in wool, let that mean that the ships are unarmed merchantmen. But if the wrapping of each egg is of grass or straw, I will understand they sail in warships. But if they should sail in unarmed ships with warships for an escort, you will place the packages of

*The modern Cherbourg.



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eggs inside a basket, and that basket inside another one, and so on, to indicate how many warships. The stronger and bigger the baskets, the bigger and better armed I will understand those warships to be. Is all that clear to you?"

SKELL nodded. He folded his arms. His delight in intrigue was offsetting the fear that kept his yellow teeth exposed.

"Now as to the Spanish troops' direction. It may be difficult to convey that information, but let us take the harbor of Dertemue* as the place where I will expect them unless there is news to the contrary. If they should sail to the westward of Dertemue, then include a duck's egg in the package. If to the eastward of it, then a dozen or so black hen's feathers. But if there should be two duck's eggs, then I will understand that they sail around the end of Britain to the West coast. Although the Romans are no sailors, so I think that course unlikely. Now, can you remember all that?"

Skell nodded again.

"How shall the messenger find you?" he asked. "Will you be here?"

"Not I! Nor will I tell you where I will be, since the wind and weather have a part to play. Nor can I spare Conops, for I have a crew of land crabs to be hammered into men with seamen's souls. I will send a man to Hythe, who will await you or your messenger. He will not know where to find me, for there are too many informers on the prowl, but I will find him."

Conops laid the fried eggs, bacon, hot bread and scalded milk on the table in front of Tros, pushing the sword out of the way and making a great clatter of plates and spoons. Dawn began to peer palely through the chink in the wooden shutters. Tros yawned and fell to at the food.

"Go, eat. Clothe yourself. Be ready in an hour," he said to Skell, and Skell went out with a stride that alternated between cat-like caution and a swagger.

"Already he thinks he carries eggs!" said Conops, grinning. "You have chosen a weak agent, master!"

"Aye, and a poisonous bad cook!" Tros spat the bread out of his mouth. "You dog! You feed me ashes?"

"Wholesome, master! Good for your insides! Ashes—not much, just a little—fell into the dough. I couldn't help it."

"Ashes? Pluto rot you! It's a charred oak knot. Break my teeth, will you!"

Tros swallowed the hot milk, set down the beaker, took more of the alleged bread and rammed it into Conops' mouth, holding the Greek's head under his armpit, ramming in more and more with both his thumbs until the gag was solid. Then he buckled on his sword and strode out to the shipyard, where Sigurdsen, in two languages, was bellowing curses at a group of Britons who had knocked out the ratchet of a crane too suddenly and dropped a load of lumber on the ship's deck.

The sun was hardly over the skyline and the mist hung like washed wool over the river, but the whole yard was a-hum already with the orderly excitement of a task now almost finished. There was a reek of hot pitch and a squeal of cordage as they rigged the tackles to the anchored buoys in mid-stream—sudden squalls of hammer-blows where Northmen in the ship's waist fitted up the berths. For Tros had carried innovation to the limit and provided a dry section of the hold wherein his ablest seamen might sleep comfortably and, aft of that again, an almost sumptuous saloon for his lieutenants. She was a wonder of a ship. She was to have a wonder-name bestowed on her at high noon. For a while Tros stood admiring her vermilion topsides, which had cost him a fortune in mercury and sulfur for the paint.

Orwic came, dew on his face, leaping along a chariot-pole and standing beside Tros almost before the long-maned stallions could plant their forefeet in the sod and bring the chariot to a clattering halt.

"Men!" he said, agape at the great ship's gleaming splendor, for Tros had made them polish up the tin against the launching. "Men! Men! Tros, what say you? Let us feed Northmen their own meat! Red rascals! They have raided our coasts since before the memory of man. Let's raid theirs for a change! Cross the North Sea, burn some villages, round up women and hold them until they trade us a man for them apiece! Northmen are better sailors than you'll ever find in Britain."

"No," said Tros.

"Why not? Ludd's teeth! They've earned reprisals! We'd be doing favors to the gods by raping half-a-dozen homesteads!"

*The modern Dartmouth.

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"I have enough Northmen," Tros answered. He knew better than to talk to Orwic about the ethics of honest raiding. Orwic would have hunted men as cheerfully as wolves. "Too many of a kind is worse than too few. I will be captain of my ship."

ORWIC pushed the peaked steel cap back from his forehead, scratched his hair and looked at Tros curiously, as at a man who might be talking nonsense to conceal his thoughts.

"You have nearly two hundred Britons," he remarked. "They are used now to your eight-and-forty Northmen. If a mutiny should start, do you think Britons would take your side?"

Tros looked hard at him.

"When I studied the mysteries," he said, "I was taught the properties of triangles. A triangle will carry more weight than a square and, with the weight on it, is not so easy to upset. You understand me?"

"No," said Orwic.

Tros refraining from explanations, turned to greet Caswallon who arrived four-horsed, at full speed, with the morning sun behind him, gleaming on his flowing hair.

Today? Surely today?" Caswallon asked.

And when Tros nodded he drew him aside by the sleeve.

"I have a thought how you can get more men, but not a word to Orwic! You heard Rhys speak of the taxes from his district? Well, they are in arrear. Orwic is in debt to Rhys, who threatens a suit against him to prevent his sailing with you. If Orwic knew what I intend, he would probably go and kill Rhys, and I have too much trouble on my hands already without that. Listen now. Rhys comes to the launching, and his men will work a mischief to you if it can be managed. Be prepared."

"I am!" Tros answered, thinking of the chemical and Conops with his torch.

"Be prepared to bag Rhys! Trap him! Seize him!"

"Make a sailor of that raw-bones, that orator, that skin-a-louse?" Tros asked. "The Sea God would wreck me in fair weather for the insult to his waves!"

"No, no. I need Rhys. He can govern his district. But I need the taxes that he hasn't paid. Catch Rhys and accuse him of anything. Demand from him fifty men. Your Northmen must pounce on his escort, and it won't much matter if they happen to kill a few. I will have some of my bowmen placed where they can keep the public from taking sides. Rhys will appeal to me, of course, and I will refuse to do anything about it until he pays the tribute money.

"But I think—for I know Rhys—that if you should hold him fast, but let him send a messenger, he will attend to it that the tribute money is paid before he appeals to me. I will then demand from him a heavy fine, both for having been slow with his payment and for having started a riot in your shipyard. I will demand a fine that I know he can not pay. He has too many armed men in his district, so I will let him pay in men instead of money. Those men you shall have for your ship, friend Tros, and I will see to it that they are good ones. Thus we do each other a good turn. But don't tell Orwic. Rhys is threatening to seize his property and hold his person. Orwic would certainly kill him if he knew there was going to be a good opportunity."

Tros demurred. Like Caswallon, he had too much trouble on his hands without courting more. And besides, he wanted no more Britons in his crew, particularly not unwilling ones.

"I am admiral of Cæsar's fleet," he said, frowning, but with a smile behind his eyes. "Lend me a two-horse chariot to send to Pevensey and I will get all the men I need without having to pick bones with Rhys."

Caswallon stared at him.

"Men from Pevensey?"

"From Gaul! According to my admiral's appointment, written over Cæsar's seal, I have full right to levy men, and no Roman may refuse me."

"Tell me about that later. I need the tribute money," said Caswallon. "Catch me this fellow Rhys."

Tros' eyes grew narrow as he scanned Caswallon's face.

"You are a king," he answered. "Kings forever speak in riddles. But are you and I on such terms? Speak me frankly. Is it likely, think you, I would refuse you an act of friendship even with my own hands full?"

Caswallon's mouth moved nervously beneath the long mustache, but that was the only sign he gave that there was a deeper intrigue beneath the one he had proposed.

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"For you—for your sake I will catch Rhys," Tros continued, watching him. "For myself, I have no need of him nor of his men."

He did not believe for a minute that Orwic would kill Rhys simply because he owed Rhys money. Orwic was wealthy; easily could pay his debts before he sailed.

"King—aye, I am the king," Caswallon answered wearily. "I hate the sea, and yet I envy you your ship. Catch Rhys for me. I need him caught. Yes, you shall have the chariot for Pevensey. But why?"

"I send a messenger to Cæsar!"

"Are you mad, Tros?"

"I am Cæsar's admiral. I need men. I will have them."

"Rede me that riddle!"

"Rede me yours first," Tros retorted, "Aye, I will catch Rhys for you. But why?"

"Leave my shame hidden in my heart, Tros. Pride is a king's one solace for the sweat of ruling people."

Tros eyed him gravely, hands behind his back, frown slowly changing into a smile.

"I, too, am not without pride," he retorted. "I am your friend. I will do as you wish. But would you make a mere blind accomplice of me? Have I ever violated confidence?"

"Ludd's teeth! I hate to tell you," said Caswallon. "Rhys is a member of my council. He is a lord of Britain, and you are our guest, not only mine. I wish to save Rhys from a crime that would bring shame on all of us."

"And Orwic is not to know, because he would kill Rhys if he did?"

Tros nodded. He began to comprehend. He had had a dozen opportunities to learn how sacred the Britons held their law of hospitality and he knew, too, that, though killing is a simple matter, kingdoms are not preserved by killing. He could understand how Rhys, reduced to impotence, might cease to be a danger to the state, whereas his death might loose such reins of vengeance as should start a civil war. And he understood how shame would devour Caswallon if a member of the council should by any treachery cause disaster to the country's guest.

"I will catch Rhys," he repeated.

And he held a mental reservation that from Rhys himself he would learn Caswallon's secret, quite confident meanwhile that information would confirm his own guess.

Caswallon drove away to send the chariot for Skell and Tros made rearrangements in the shipyard, going about it cautiously, because there were already scores of spectators pressing their faces against the picket fence, awaiting admission.

A last look at the ship convinced him there could be no trouble with the launching. A dozen blows to knock the chocks from under her, perhaps a few turns on the great bronze screw to lift her bow end, and she would glide down the ways into her element. He could spare thirty Northmen, and they were free men, entitled to carry arms. None could charge them with crime if they should defend the yard, however desperately, against rioters, whoever those rioters might be.

BUT he kept the Northmen near the waterfront, concealing them inside a low shed about fifty yards from the ship and nearly midway to the outer fence, warning them what to expect and forbidding them to use sharp-edged weapons unless their first surprize assault with pick handles and capstan bars should fail.

"It is worse to be clubbed than to be knifed," he admitted, "but it causes less public comment. Let us shed no blood if we can help it."

Then he laid the trap for Rhys by covering the ways with cloth about ten feet in front of the ship's stern, and so arranging grass beneath the cloth that any one looking for that might suppose an unconscious human victim had been tied in readiness for the ship to crush to pulp as it slid stern first into the water.

The Lord Rhys came betimes, forcing his way through the crowd at the gate with twenty men behind him and ignoring Conops who bade him wait and give Caswallon precedence. Behind Rhys and his followers the whole crowd flowed into the yard, and if it had not been that Caswallon arrived next, with Fflur and fifty archers, there might have been a riot there and then, because Tros' Britons tried to keep the crowd within the enclosure he had roped off, and free men resented interference from the slaves. However, the archers solved that problem, extending themselves at intervals outside the rope, stringing their bows suggestively.

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Soon nearly all the members of the council came, each with his following of armed retainers. Tros had seats for the principal lords and ladies and, after a great deal of shouting, the retainers were all crowded to the rear within easy reach of the secreted chemical that, should Conops touch the torch to it, could reduce them to helpless panic. An hour before high noon there were more than a thousand people in the yard, chattering and staring at the mysterious linen sheet that covered the great ship's figure-head.

Long before the Druids came it was evident that Rhys had trouble in his sack and meant to loose it at his own good time. He alone of all the noblemen was truculent, objecting to his seat behind the rope, nervous and argumentative because his men were herded away from him, sarcastic because Caswallon and Fflur had better seats, impatient of delay and rising from time to time to peer as far as he could see around the ship. Tros had placed him carefully. At last, straining his neck, he detected the shape of a human victim shrouded under canvas on the ways.

Instantly he was on his feet and was about to announce his discovery at the top of his lungs, but he checked himself. Blackmailer by profession, he foresaw more profit to himself from crime committed than from its exposure in advance. Instead of saying what he saw he cried out to Tros to come and speak with him and, nothing loath, Tros strode up looking splendid in his purple cloak trimmed with cloth-of-gold and ermine.

"Lord Tros," said Rhys, "there should be proof that no human sacrifice is made today. It is in your interest that somebody should stand near to the ship—some man of repute, myself, for instance, to take oath afterward that there were no black rites performed out of sight of the Druids."

"None better than you, Lord Rhys!" Tros answered. "Everybody knows you are not my friend. If you can find nothing against me, none can! Come along."

But Rhys refused to come without his men.

"You mean, don't you, you are not my friend!" he retorted. "I would not trust myself alone within reach of your engines of destruction."

"Bring them then. Bring them by all means," said Tros with a laugh and a gesture of lordly carelessness that mightily offended Rhys. But at sight of the gesture Conops pulled a string that warned the Northmen in the shed to hold themselves in readiness.

The interested buzz-note of the crowd changed into a half roar of excitement as Tros strode beside Rhys to the ship with all Rhys' men in a double line behind them looking businesslike. There was even jealousy, expressed in catcalls. Was Rhys to have the special honor of a close up view of the launching? Why? There were Caswallon and a hundred others better entitled to that than Rhys! There was even an effort to follow them down to the ways and Caswallon's archers had their hands full checking it until a blare of music in the distance announced that the Druids were coming downstream in their swan-necked barges. They came very slowly on the slack tide, chanting, and the crowd grew still, spellbound by the beauty of the scene, for the sun shone on the gilded swans and on the gilded oar blades. And in the river's bosom there were mirrored white clouds mingled with the limpid blue.

"Lord Rhys," said Tros, "I am minded you shall do your spying thoroughly. First look at this."

He led him to the canvas on the ways and raised it, showing dry grass underneath. Then, before Rhys could recover from that disappointment—

"Let your men look into that shed," he suggested.

It was a double shed, with a long partition down the middle, and there were no windows, so it was dark inside. Several of the men peered in, reporting nothing, but Tros refused to be satisfied.

"Let them examine it," he insisted. So Rhys, to save his own face, ordered them into the shed, retaining only six to guard himself.

"And while they search within there," Tros said, "you and I and these others will search the ship for such victims as you think I immolate. Up that ladder!"

As Rhys turned to look at the ladder Tros shut the shed door quietly and slid the bolt. And as he did that Sigurdsen came glooming up with nine men, all armed with hammers, who placed themselves with their backs to the shed and began a prodigious pounding on a hollow log, breaking it up, and for no reason in the world unless it might be

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pagan pleasure at the noise. They made such thunder that if there had been a battle royal in the shed, none could have heard it.

"Up you go. That way," Tros said, pointing.

The ladder was a wide one, resting on a scaffold with a platform at the top that hardly touched the ship's side, so that there was no need to remove it for the launching. Rhys, half suspicious of a trap, began to climb it, hesitated, and continued when he saw Tros standing at the bottom, back turned toward him, seemingly considering the Druids who were anchoring their seven barges in a line across the river nearly a hundred yards below the course the ship would take.

AT EXACTLY high noon Rhys stood on the platform, startled by the fanfare of the Druids' golden trumpets. That, and the sudden silence by the shed door as the hammer swinging ceased. Sigurdsen and six men sprang up the ladder, and Tros did not wait to watch them hustle Rhys and his six over the ship's side and down into the hold. He ran, four Northmen following, toward the ship's bow, blowing his silver whistle and, while they and others who were waiting chopped and hammered at the chocks, he pulled the cord that held the sheet in place over the ship's figurehead.

"Oh, *Liafail!*" he cried, and all men heard that wonder name, but the rest of what he said was swallowed by the crack of breaking timber, like explosions, as the ship's weight broke the hammer chocks.

There was movement, nigh invisible at first, increasing inch by inch. The crowd roared and the Druids' trumpets blared. The sheet fell away from the figurehead, revealing Helma's image, blue, with golden hair and crown, and above that the great glittering serpent's head, whose tongue moved on a gymbal, flashing four ways in the sun.

Slowly, and then with a roar like the sound of an avalanche, to the blare of trumpets and the thunder of a hundred war drums, the ship slid down the ways until she shoved the reeking mud in waves to either side of her, pitched like a horse impatient of the bit, so that her serpent looked like a living dragon with a tongue of fire, rocked into mid-stream and lay rolling to the taut, complaining cables that had ripped the buried anchors ten feet forward through the earth. The Druids' barges rocked in obligato to the big ship's roll, as a hymn swelled forth across the river, praising Ludd, the God of River Thames, whose bosom bears the big ships to the ocean and the storms and deep-sea destiny.

Tros laughed. He could not help but laugh to see his vision launched at last, his dream of dreams, his masterpiece that lay so graceful and enormous on the water—too high yet, for there were the ballast and the stores and water to be loaded; but exactly, to the inch, as he had known she would ride—bow high like a war-horse, with a flare to throw off head-seas, and as naturally even on her keel as if the gods had balanced her.

"Oh, *Liafail!* Gods govern you! I am a man at last!" He laughed and clapped his hands together. "No blood! No man, no beast slain at the launching! Hah!"

Then suddenly he thought him of the shed and went and shot the bolt back from the door. His Northmen came forth one by one, each with his weapon sheathed, but each with a pick handle or an ax-helve in his hand. He counted them and they were all there, but some limped, and they all looked more or less the worse for what had happened in the dark.

"How many?" he demanded, gesturing toward the shed. He had to ask twice, because the Northmen stared in silent admiration at the great ship they had toiled to build.

"Oh, some are dead and some are tied. They fought. One way or another we did for all of them. I killed two, for they had skulls like eggs," a Northman answered, then turned his head again to stare and grin at the great ship.

Tros did not enter the shed just then. He was wondering whether the ship was actually launched before the blood flowed.

"Blood!" he muttered. "Blood is not good at a ship's launching. I should have had a Druid cast her horoscope. I should have chosen another hour, another day. But a slack tide at high noon seemed auspicious. Blood!"

He determined not to see the blood just then at any rate. He closed the shed door, turned his back and walked away. A vague uneasiness troubled him, but he steeled his mind to forget this seemingly bad omen.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE LORD RHYS

CASWALLON cleared the yard to some extent by leading the way out of it with Fflur. Numbers of the younger people followed Orwic through the same gate, joking with him about his rumored intention to sail in the monster ship with Tros. But a number remained who defied Caswallon's archers, hanging about the yard in disappointment at the shortness of the spectacle and hoping something else might transpire presently to make the waste of half a day worth while. There were sheds to be peered into, cranes to examine, the splinters to see on the ways where the great ship had slid riverward, scandalous waste of floating grease to be appalled at, and questions to ask of the slaves who were glad enough to talk if any one would listen to them.

But Tros blew his whistle three times sharply, and at that signal Conops fired a pound or so of dampened chemical beneath a covering of sawdust. Ominous sputtering, flame, yellow and black smoke, and then the choking stench blew crosswise of the yard, and in a minute it was empty of archers as well as visitors, all racing for the trees beyond the fence. Tros' slaves, now used to the appalling stuff, took refuge to windward in their own long sheds, whither Tros betook himself to roust out nine of them to make up a boat's crew. Ten minutes later he had climbed the *Liafail's* high stern and stood there for a minute watching Sigurdsen bandage a wound on a Northman's forearm and then put grease on a bruise on the same man's head.

"Blood!" he muttered. "Blood again. Not good! Where's the Lord Rhys?"

Sigurdsen showed him. Rhys sat fuming in the fore part of the after deckhouse, where the V-shaped slits of openings gave command of a whole broadside to the arrow engines, covered under canvas now. Rhys' wrists were lashed behind him to two rings in the deckhouse wall and his feet were stretched so tightly toward a table leg that he could hardly sit on the narrow bench. His weapons were gone, but he was unharmed—only shaken, ruffled and indignant.

"Where are his men?" Tros asked.

"One's overboard—took a capstan-bar under the chin," said Sigurdsen. "The rest are only stunned. They're in the forepeak, under hatches."

"Loose him."

Sigurdsen obeyed, and Rhys chafed tingling wrists while Tros kicked at his own scabbard as a hint that he was master of the situation

"You will pay for this!" Rhys snapped at him, and blew his long nose with his fingers. The effect was exactly as if he had spat, and Tros changed his mind abruptly how to deal with him.

"Pay, shall I?" he retorted. "Whom?"

"Me!" Rhys answered. "You will pay me! I am a member of the council."

Tros rubbed his iron jaw.

"Sit down!" he commanded, for Rhys had risen as if to snap defiant fingers at him. "Now, I don't know what you ever did, Lord Rhys, to earn the right to live, but you may earn my leave this minute or become a million pieces in the bellies of a million fish!"

"Your—your leave!" Rhys stammered.

He was furious. It had not dawned on his imagination yet that Tros might dare to kill him.

"You would better offer me a price, Lord Tros! You bilked me in the matter of the slaves, but, believe me, this time you shall pay, or I know nothing!"

"It is what you know. That is the price I set," Tros answered. "Come along now. Out with it! The Lord Caswallon begged your life of me, saying you are a member of the council who should be spared if possible. I promised him your life on one condition."

"You! You will never dare murder me!" Rhys stammered.

It was beginning to dawn at last. Caswallon's name had startled him.

"Dare—yes! But do it—no! Unless you tell me what I wish to know, although I know it—but it would please me to hear it from your lips—you shall fight me, or whichever champion I name. I think I will name Sigurdsen, who hasn't killed a man in weeks and needs the practise. Sigurdsen fights with an ax. Now, which will you? Fight or speak? You may send a message to Caswallon if you wish."

Rhys grew a whole shade paler. He had counted on appealing to Caswallon. The mere threat of what Caswallon would be forced to do by way of vengeance if a member of his council should be harmed, he had supposed would be enough to bring Tros to his senses.

"I may send—then you mean—the—the Lord Caswallon is a party to this outrage?"

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"He has begged your life," Tros answered. "I have named the terms to him—that you must tell me all you know."

"About what? You have a charge against me?"

"Yes," said Tros, "I charge you with plotting to destroy me in league with Gwenwynwyn, king of the Ordovici! Cæsar set a price of three Roman talents on my head. Gwenwynwyn will pay a third of that to whoever delivers my head to him. Now, make a clean breast of it or fight!"

"Slay him, Lord Tros!" urged Sigurdsen. "I would liefer spare a wolf at lambing time! Here—let me have at him! There are no witnesses."

"You hear what he says?" grinned Tros. "You would have had my life. How did you propose to have it?"

Rhys had his doubts of Tros' willingness to kill in cold blood, but no man could have doubted Sigurdsen who, if necessary, could be made the scapegoat afterwards. That argument stared self-revealed out of his frightened eyes.

"What do you want me to tell?" he demanded. "What if I tell? What then?"

Tros had not answered when the thump of oars alongside announced the arrival of Caswallon in a boat rowed by his own retainers. He came alone into the deck-house, eyed Rhys coldly for as long as sixty breaths, said nothing and walked out again, slamming the door behind him.

"The Lord Caswallon has his own crow to pick with you. He wishes to know nothing about mine," said Tros. "We will pick mine first. Unfold the plot between you and Gwenwynwyn!"

Rhys capitulated, deathly fear behind his eyes, convinced at last that he was wholly at Tros' mercy. He kept licking his lips as he spoke.

"THERE is no plot between me and Gwenwynwyn, who is a coward and a fool. It is true that Cæsar offered him three talents for your head, but he is afraid to kill you for fear of Caswallon's vengeance, even though Cæsar is sending him five hundred soldiers to protect him. So Gwenwynwyn sent his minstrel to me with a promise of one third of the money if I would send him your head in a basket.

"Lord Tros, I believe you to be a public enemy. It is no disgrace to me that I determined there and then for legal cause to have you executed. But why should I share the reward with Gwenwynwyn? I could take your head to Cæsar, couldn't I? And I would do no murder. Gods forbid that I should murder any man! But to seize a public enemy and lay a proven charge against him, whether of human sacrifice or what else, to cause him to be executed and to take his head to Cæsar to prove he is dead, and thus to remove one of Cæsar's excuses for making war on us—that would be a service to my country. Lord Tros, your heart, if you have one, must tell you I am right. There would be no disgrace if I should make a profit for myself by ridding my country of a dangerous alien, such as I hold you to be."

"No, no!" Tros commented. "Not you! No, you could not be disgraced that easily! However, you are my prisoner. Your men attacked mine."

"They did not!" Rhys interrupted, blazingly indignant.

A false charge against himself aroused the uttermost depths of his resentment.

"Your men attacked mine in the shed down yonder by the waterside," Tros continued, making up his story to fit the circumstances, stroking his jaw with his right hand, head a little to one side. "You planned to have your men seize me. That is why you tried to decoy me on board my ship, you mounting the ladder and turning to tempt me to follow, as all men saw! Caswallon saw it. All the council saw it, and their wives and all the public! Everybody saw your men invade the shed."

"It is a lie!" Rhys snarled.

"Maybe. Maybe. It is something like what you intended, though it happened I was ready for you, and your plan failed."

"I say it is a lie!"

"I heard you. But it was also a lie that I intended human sacrifice. It is a lie that I am a public enemy. And it is not a lie that you are my prisoner. What do you propose to do about it?"

"I? Nothing! What should I do?"

"No offer you would care to make?"

"You mean money? I—"

"You could offer, for instance, to tell me what arrangements you agreed on between Cæsar and Gwenwynwyn, in the event that Cæsar should pay those three talents for my head! How many men you will provide to help Cæsar against Caswallon when the

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invasion comes? How many chariots? How many horses? Bah! I know your breed! There are rascals such as you in all lands—liars who can lie within a hair's breadth of the truth, plotters who can plot under a mask of loyalty, law breakers who can make the law a whip for other men. Ludd's blood! If I were king in Britain I would whip your head off faster than a cook kills chickens!"

Tros strode to the door, opened it and nodded to Caswallon, who came in, this time followed by a pair of his gentlemen-at-arms.

"Rhys, these are witnesses," he said. "I charge you that the tribute money is near two years in arrear. I charge you that you tried to start a riot in the shipyard yonder, where a thousand saw your men invade Tros' shed. I fine you double of the tribute money. And for your lawless conduct in the shipyard you shall pay ten chariots with bronze wheels, a hundred four-year-old horses, a hundred bronze swords, a hundred bronze spear-heads, a hundred shields, a hundred sets of harness, a hundred yew bows, two thousand arrows, bronze-tipped, wild goose-feathered, a hundred helmets, two thousand yards of woollen cloth, a thousand ewes, a hundred steers, and ten farms—those that lie nearest Lunden!"

Rhys stared blankly.

"That is all I have!" he said in an awed voice.

"No, not all. Not quite all. But enough to keep you chastened for a while!" Caswallon answered, nodding.

Rhys exploded.

"I appeal! You have no legal right to fine me! This is a monstrous fine for nothing! It is plunder! I defy you! I demand a trial before the council."

"Shall I leave you to the Lord Tros?" Caswallon asked, raising his eyebrows. "Rhys, Rhys, I am ashamed! If I were not an easy-going king I would have slain you long ago. I spare you because you rule your district, though you rule it over harshly. But I will not trust you until that fine is paid, because I know you have plotted with Cæsar and Gwenwynwyn. Spare me, then, the deeper shame of having to expose you."

He turned his back to give Rhys time to think. There was no shame on Rhys' face, only calculation of the odds against him and a cold, pragmatic selfishness.

"I will pay," he said, catching his breath. It hurt him more to say it than a whipping would have done.

"I will see that you do!" Caswallon answered, turning again to face him. "Tros, I saw Rhys' steward climb the ladder with him. Where is he now?"

"In the fore-peak unless he was the man who fell overboard,"

"Let the steward be brought. Rhys, you will send your steward, giving orders to him in my presence to bring the doubled tribute money and the fine in full to Lunden. When the whole of it is paid the Lord Tros will release you and as many of your men as have not been killed through your own treachery. Tros, can you keep Rhys safe without fetters?"

Tros nodded.

"Sigurdsen shall nail him into an empty water cask, and he shall stay in darkness in the ship's hold until you send me word to loose him. As for his men in the shed down yonder—"

"They are yours!" Caswallon interrupted. "They are not bad fighting men. They are Rhys' best. Bring them here and put a hatch on them until the ship sails."

Tros demurred.

"They are not slaves," he objected. "They will simply run at the first chance, and meanwhile I shall have to handle them with capstan bars. There'll be trouble enough without—"

"Chain them to the oars!" Caswallon urged.

Tros shook his head. He knew, from long experience of ships in the Levant, the uselessness of that procedure. Men chained to the oars die of heart-break, and the work they do is not worth food and whip. Even the Romans realized it and, except in the case of punished criminals, never chained men at the galley benches.

"Throw them into Lunden jail," he answered.

"But I thought you must have men?"

"I must. But I have other men in mind."

Caswallon strode out of the deckhouse, beckoning Tros to follow.

"Brother Tros," he said, taking his arm outside the door, "I can not put men in Lunden jail without bringing them to trial except in cases of high treason and rebellion. Even for high treason or rebellion, I mush have the council's affirmation."

"Then let them go," said Tros.

"*Tchutt!* They would try to rescue Rhys. Rhys is known to be rich. I must reduce

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Rhys' riches drastically before I can afford to turn those men loose. Bring them aboard the ship."

Tros laughed.

"I have made no bargain yet with Rhys," he answered. He returned into the deckhouse, where Rhys sat glowering at Sigurdsen.

"Rhys—"

"I am the Lord Rhys to my enemies!"

"Lord Rhys, I have no notion how many of your men are still alive in yonder shed, but as many as live are my hostages. I will keep them aboard this ship until I am out of reach of your poisoners, your arrows, your informers. If, when you have paid the Lord Caswallon's fine and I have set you free, you do me no annoyance of whatever kind, you shall have those men back, subject to their good behavior as well as yours. So you would better warn them, even as I will. When I have no further use for them as hostages, say a month from now, or a few days more or less, and provided you have done me not an injury meanwhile, I will set them free somewhere on the coast of Britain, each with his weapon and a little journey money, and they may find their own way back to you. Is that clear?"

Rhys nodded, scowling.

"You understand me? Fully? Very well then. Bring his steward, Sigurdsen. After the steward has received instructions, nail Rhys up in the water cask and let Northmen stand watch over him in two-hour tricks. Rhys, Lord Rhys, you would better bid your steward make haste. It will be dark there in the hold. A water cask is big, but not a pleasant place to spend a week in. Fall away, Sigurdsen. I'll watch him while you bring the steward."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LORD RHYS' TENANTRY

STORES began coming aboard that afternoon, although the slaves claimed holiday to celebrate the launching. Tros did not dare to waste minutes now. Hours might make the difference between catching Cæsar's Spaniards in mid-channel or being obliged to land and fight them somewhere on the British coast. At sea, the odds were in his favor, supposing he could lick that crew of his into anything like shape. On land, five hundred Spaniards under a Roman officer would have it all their own way, as against himself with only eight-and-forty Northmen, Orwic and perhaps a few of his retainers and as many of his British slaves as he might dare to form into a landing party.

Men, men, men! He must have men! That song was singing in his brain the while as they towed the *Liafail* alongside the light pier he had constructed, and all the rest of that day until midnight, while he drove the slave gangs mercilessly. Endless streams of food, stores, water, ammunition, tools, spare sails and cordage poured into their appointed places, and the Northmen labored at the stowing, each man in charge of one section of the hold.

The risk of fire made Tros' skin creep. He was everywhere, cautioning torchmen, alert and anxious. Gildas with a bucket gang and another gang in readiness to man the great chain-pump, stood watch amidship, and there were boxes of wet sand set wherever there was room for them. Conops in person stowed the leaden balls filled with mixed explosive in the magazines below the four great catapults, and in other magazines beside those, tons of charcoal, rezin, sawdust, sulfur and that other strange ingredient ready to be mixed, that Tros had dug from under the horse manure in the cave below Caswallon's stables.

By midnight, because Tros had foreseen everything, the stores were stowed, the lights were out, the slaves asleep on bunks beside the staggered oar benches and the hatches, covered with pitched canvas, in position. All lay snug and tight against the rain that drummed on the upper deck. The shrouds were slackened; the ship was again in mid-stream riding to her own bronze anchor with a cowhide parceling on the warp, and the shipyard was deserted. The Northmen—they were Tros' marines, berthed for his protection between his stateroom under the poop and the rows of bunks on which the rest of the crew slept—snored in their own snug quarters. Conops, yawning at the anchor watch, cried, "All's well!" It was a day's work to be proud of, and a night of nights—the first afloat!

But the more Tros thought, the more he gloried in the great ship's size and her proportions and the novelty and skill of her design. The more he wondered at success, the more the fact oppressed him that he must have men, men, men.

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On either side of the ship there were three banks, each for fifty oars. He had less than two hundred Britons. It was just conceivable his eight-and-forty Northmen were enough to handle, reef, steer and provide the necessary boatswains, two lieutenants and two oar captains, one for each side of the ship. But of the Britons, ten were needed for the cooking and such details. Ten more were not more than enough to keep the ship comparatively clean. And though the Druids had given him a kegfull of pungent smelling extract that they said would keep the smallpox and the harbor plague away, he knew that cleanliness was all-essential. He had seen too many ships rot, crew and all, of their own foulness. He was determined this should not happen to ships under his command.

Then, the wear and tear aloft would be prodigious, and would call for constant overhauling, for he had not only three masts, in itself an innovation, but three topmasts, his own bold, original invention, and a corresponding maze of rigging. Under sail he did not doubt he would have speed enough to run from any Roman on the seas but, failing wind, he would need at least another hundred and fifty oarsmen, to allow for a few sick men and a few reliefs. And even so, there would be no men to spare to man the catapults, the arrow-engines and to stand off boarders.

Men! He must have men swiftly, and at least two hundred. Moreover, they must not be Britons, or the risk of mutiny would be too great. He laughed to think that Cæsar should send Spaniards from Gaul exactly at the moment when he needed them. He scowled when he thought of the weakness of his untrained crew.

"The gods," he told himself, "enjoy a man's alertness. They are offering me opportunity."

He did not pray to the gods. He knew better. Such prayer as he put forth was will to seize the moment, action, effort and self-watchfulness.

Nor had he qualms about the Spaniards. They were not slaves yet. But presently they should be, if his own resourcefulness and courage could contrive it. They were men, presumably, who hired themselves to Cæsar for his purposes; expecting, in addition to their pay, such loot and opportunities for license as his victories should provide. In Tros' unusual view of things, that made them his fair prey. He respected no man's liberty unless the man himself respected other people's. A soldier fighting for the freedom of his own land, he admired, he loved; a mercenary in the pay of an invader he considered no more than a prostitute to Cæsar's will, no more to be treated as a free man with a free man's rights than cattle need be.

But how to get those Spaniards! First, by hook or crook, he must instil enthusiasm into his untrained British oarsmen, and then train them—no small miracle! Thereafter, making out of Thames mouth for the open sea, he must give his Northmen practise in the handling of the ship before he could dare to engage Cæsar's warships, clumsy and ill-handled though the Roman biremes might be. He must cruise along the coast and run in to find Skell's messenger. And if, as was all too likely, Skell should fail him, he must cruise down-channel searching for the Spaniards, trusting to the gods to show them to him.

"Zeus!" he muttered. "How I'd love a crew of Romans! Give me enough Romans and I'd purge Rome! But they won't follow a man who doesn't think that Rome is right because Rome does."

And he knew he could not make use of Romans for the purpose that he had in view, or he had it in him to dare to trap a few of Cæsar's cohorts and to put his own strong yoke on their proud necks. If he would go to Rome to plead Caswallon's cause he must have men with him who would regard Rome as their natural enemy, or at least not as their mother city, and who, in consequence, would not desert in the hope of finding easier servitude ashore. He was sure of his Northmen and Britons. He was nearly sure the Spaniards would have had their bellyful of Cæsar and would be complacent about changing masters.

He slept not at all that night, but paced the poop and the deck with the blustering rain in his face, using himself to the feel of the ship underfoot, to her length and her breadth, to her height above the water—absorbing her into his consciousness.

WHEN dawn at last sent shafts of golden light along the river, touching the great serpent's trembling tongue, Tros greeted it, arms folded, on the poop and laughed along the deck to Conops who came sleepily

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off watch to urge him to turn in and rest.

"These Britons of ours will tax you, master! Sleep before the trouble starts!"

"It has begun!" Tros answered, glancing at the river. "Turn out all the Northmen!"

There were two score boats already coming up-stream, loaded full of traders and the olla podrida of Thames' side.

"Watch that no slave goes overboard, and stand those boats off with arrowfire if need be! Let no boats but Orwic's or Caswallon's come alongside."

It was an ancient game, as old as navigation, to approach a ship about to sail and tempt her crew with promises of shore work and high wages. Her master, then, had the alternative of long delay while he pursued deserters or of putting to sea short-handed, leaving his slaves to become the property of whoever had tempted them ashore.

He began to be angry with Orwic for keeping him waiting; angry with Caswallon because he knew it was Caswallon who had feasted Orwic all night long, and that both of them were probably dead drunk; angry with a longshore crowd that was already looting in the shipyard, breaking up the sheds and carrying off in ox-carts and on men's heads every stick that was removable. But more than all else, he was angry because the boats were there and he must make the first experiments with the oars before an audience of critics who would laugh.

He ate breakfast without appetite, then ordered an anchor out over the stern and let the ship swing down-stream.

"Man the benches!" he commanded, scowling at the onlookers. If he had thought they would accept a reasonable sum he would have paid them all to go away.

First came babbling confusion while the Britons were selected, bench by bench, according to their height, weight, reach of arm, known courage or faint-heartedness; and a mark was painted on each man to correspond to the bench on which he was to sit and on the oar he was to use.

That business took two hours, and not one was satisfied. The upper-bank men grumbled at the length and weight of oar they had to pull; the lower-bank men cried for head room, air, view, noisily asserting fear that waves would enter through the lower oar ports.

"Whip!" Tros thundered. "Whip for the man who speaks again until I give leave!"

There had not been much whip hitherto in Tros' mixed methods of maintaining discipline. A sudden onslaught by the Northmen leaping along the gang-planks by the benches and the cracking of leather whips on naked shoulders produced more effect than if the Britons had been used to it. There was silence and a long pause. One by one, then, Northmen showed the rowers what would be expected of them at the signal.

Wand in hand on the poop, Tros stood where the drum and cymbal men could see him. They were stationed forward, under the break of the high bow, protected from the weather, cautioned never, for any reason; to take their eyes off the officer of the watch. Tros gave the signal—

"Ready!"

Drums and cymbals crashed three times, and the oars, after a lot of shouting by the Northmen, moved into position ready for the dip. Again and again Tros repeated the signal, Conops running along the gang-planks, moving and adjusting oar handles until all the vermilion blades were poised exactly evenly above the water. Then, setting the time slowly for the drums and cymbals, he made them move the oars in air until the rowers caught the rhythm and began to swing in unison. A cymbal-crash began the swing. A drum-beat finished it. Then:

"Dip!" he thundered, and the fun began.

For a while he was like to have to serve out new oars from the spares that were stowed in brackets fastened to the deck-beams overhead, so excitedly the Britons worked, blade hitting blade, oar-handles bumping into backs, the Northmen yelling, and the great ship swaying in the muddied water, straining at her warp. Ten, twenty times Tros signaled, "Stop!" then started them again. It was two hours, and they were all dead weary, Conops foaming at the mouth and the Northmen growing gloomy with despair, before the rowers had the hang of it and could pull ten strokes without a dozen of them "catching crabs."

Then Orwic came, pop-eyed from too much food and drink, seated between Fflur and Caswallon in the state barge, dressed in all his finery of cloth-of-gold and jewelry, with half-a-dozen boxes full of changes of apparel and sufficient assorted weapons to have armed a company of infantry. With him he brought four fair-haired gentlemen-

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at-arms, as heavy as himself from too much feasting, looking scared, as if they had made their wills and testaments, not hoping to see home again.

Fflur's eyes were wet with tears. She came up first onto the poop and kissed Tros three times, hugging him.

"Lord Tros, we love you because you have loved us, and we feel we have done too little to befriend you in return."

Caswallon laughed to hide the quaver in his voice and clapped Tros hard between the shoulder blades.

"You take my good friend Orwic! Will you leave me my enemy, Rhys, in exchange? I sent my archers with that steward to add their own impatience to his zeal. A galloper brings news they are already on the road home with the chariots and tribute money, driving the cattle in front of them. So loose Rhys. Tros, Tros, look at the sun on the water! Ludd laughs to have your great ship on his bosom!"

They all leaned overside to see the ship's reflection, silver and vermilion.

"Rhys' men?" Caswallon asked.

"I have them, all safe under hatches, except three whose skulls lacked thickness. I will set them ashore when I am out of Rhys' reach. Not, that is, until I see the last of Britain."

"The last? Nay, nay, Tros. You will come back," Caswallon answered with an air of prophecy.

Fflur shook her head.

"I fear we see the last of Orwic, too," she said, eyes wet with tears again.

"Not so!" Tros answered. "I spoke carelessly. This first voyage I make in search of men. If I fail, I will return up-Thames to coax a British crew from you before I sail for Rome. So you must watch Rhys!"

"You will not fail," Fflur said confidently.

"If I fail not, it would grieve me not to have my friends rejoice," Tros answered. "If I win those Spaniards, let us have a feast aboard my ship."

"Where?"

"Vectis. I will anchor in the lee of Vectis.* Set a watch for me. Whichever way the wind blows, I will anchor on the island's leeward side."

"That is not my country, and Ludd knows I hate the sea, but Fflur and I will come to meet you in a ship from Hythe—which is not in my country either, but they pay me tribute. That is a promise. Let us go now. I hate partings," said Caswallon.

SO TROS had Rhys brought up from the water cask in the dark hold and bade Sigurdsen return his sword and dagger to him. Rhys went ashore with Caswallon and Fflur in the barge, and Tros grinned as he watched him, looking down his long nose at Caswallon's great white fist that shook to emphasize a torrent of expletive threats.

But it was not the last Tros heard of Rhys. The while he trained, the rowers with the ship at anchor, waiting for the tide, teaching them to back oars and to swing together in response to signals, dipping and catching the weight of the ship between the crash and echo of the cymbals, there came three boats alongside from the far bank of the river. They were full of weary-looking men, and a big shock-headed Briton in the leading boat shouted that he had a message for the Lord Tros. Tros put a hand to his ear, but the man refused to shout his information to the world at large, with all those other boats drifting to and fro within range of voices. So Tros let him come aboard, but kept a Northman handy to throw him over side in case of need.

He was a well-dressed fellow—in a yellow linen smock over woollen breeches, with a big bronze buckle on his belt and a cloak of beaded deerskin. But he was soiled with travel, looked as if he had been out in the rain all night, and his leather-shod feet were smeared thickly with mud. He had a broad nose like a blackamoor's, with wide nostrils and an iron-gray mustache like a pair of diminutive horses' tails. He was excited—breathless from excitement; anxious brown eyes glittered under shaggy iron-gray brows.

"Lord Tros, I am the Lord Rhys' tenant. I am Eog, son of Louth, the blacksmith. Is it true you have the Lord Rhys prisoner?"

Tros did not answer. He waited, watching the man's face. Eog misinterpreted the silence.

"And you sail in your great ship? Then sail away with him! Drown him out there in the sea!"

The fellow glanced to right and left, fearful of being overheard, but there was only the Northman on the poop beside Tros.

*The Isle of Wight.

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Orwic and his men had turned in to sleep off last night's drunkenness.

"Lord Tros, he traffics with the Romans! He has sold us to the Romans! He has sold your ship to the Romans! He has promised to let Cæsar know by signal on the south coast when your ship sails, if he can't prevent your sailing by having you executed! He is a cruel, hard landlord. We tenants hate him. But he has the council's ear, and men say the Lord Caswallon fears him, so we don't dare to appeal against him. Kill him, Lord Tros! Kill him, and earn the blessings of his tenants!"

Tros stroked his chin. "You are late, my friend. The Lord Rhys left for Lunden in the king's barge."

Eog's face fell.

"You are undone!" he remarked, shaking his shock of hair over his eyes as he nodded. "The Lord Caswallon sent his men to Maeldon in the night. They seized horses, cows, sheep, chariots, arms, money. The Lord Rhys will beggar us to reimburse himself a little, but what he can wring from us will never satisfy him. He will send to Gaul or go to Gaul. He will betray you to the Romans for a great price! He knows you sent a messenger named Skell to Pevensey, for he sent my brother's son, armed with a sword, on a skewbald stallion to overtake and slay him. We are all undone! We are all undone!"

He wrung his hands. The corners of his mouth drooped. He looked pitifully at the men in the three boats who stared at the great ship as if salvation lay in her.

"Who are they?" Tros asked.

"Tenants and free laborers. Lord Tros, we are all liable for penalties for having left our holdings without leave. We have no right to leave our boundaries except on market days. The Lord Rhys will impose fines that will keep us beggared forever!"

Tros summoned Orwic, who came sleepily, not pleased to have been routed out of his snug cabin.

"Ludd love a fellow, Tros! What ails you? Still at anchor?" His displeasure increased as he recognized Eog. "Dog!" he remarked. "I'll wager not a tenant of my own keeps bounds this minute! What do you mean, sirrah, by gadding when your master's back is turned? Are there no fields to till? No cows to milk? No clearing to be done? No fences to repair? Ludd's blood! If I were the Lord Rhys I would deprive you of your holding!"

"He will! He will!" said Eog gloomily. "Already he takes two-thirds—two foals, two calves, two lambs, two pigs of every three, two bushels out of three of all the wheat, two months' labor out of three to plow his fields and mend his fences. Now he has been fined, and he will wring the fine from us."

"Ludd pity you!" said Orwic. "But you were born the Lord Rhys' men. I couldn't help you, even if my head weren't splitting so I can't think!"

"Lord Tros, we are not sailors," Eog said, watching Tros' face.

It was plain enough what he intended.

"Where are your women and children?" Tros asked pointedly.

"They are as good as slaves now," said Eog. "They will be slaves if we leave them, and the better off!"

Tros shook his head.

"I have some thirty of the Lord Rhys' men aboard my ship this minute," he said, stroking at his chin. "If I should add you and your companions, the Lord Rhys could indict me as a thief. Nay, nay."

"Lord Tros," said Eog, but Tros interrupted him.

"What say you, Orwic? Can a man take free men in his service if he finds them wandering outside the jurisdiction of their king?"

Orwic snorted with disgust.

"They forfeit property and holdings if they leave the land," he answered. "They are free then to serve any one they will, but who would employ runaways?"

Tros went into his stateroom underneath the poop and filled a leather purse with minted copper coin, tossing it hand to hand while he debated with himself. Presently he returned to the poop and gave the purse to Eog.

"For your services," he said. "Three or four days, maybe a week from now I will drop anchor near the coast of Vectis. If any one should bring me information of the Lord Rhys' movements, he would find me inclined to be generous. But mind you, no women and children! Leave them on the farms. And if the Lord Rhys' luck is running half as lamely as I guess it is, you might—who knows?—be pleased to return to your wives and your children and your holdings. Eog, son of Louth, the gods are

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sometimes slow, but if a man has patience, they reward him in the end exactly on his merits. Remember, on whichever side of Vectis happens to be sheltered from the wind! Not later than a week from now!"

And Eog, grinning, wondering, went overside.

## CHAPTER IX

### MAKE SAIL!

THAT afternoon, on top of the flowing tide, Tros let the *Liafail* drift down river, cymbals and drums beating a slow measure that the oars might dip sufficiently for steerage way and no more. There were narrow channels between hidden mud-banks, and the *Liafail* had a deeper draught than any vessel that had ever sailed out of the Thames or into it.

Hardly a longshoreman saw the start. Tros, not wanting a crowd of boats around him, had let it be supposed he would remain at anchor until the next day. But as the panorama glided by, the effect on river-side communities was curious. No villages were visible. Like Lunden Town itself; those were well hidden from the frequent raiders by dense screens of forest that descended to the swampy margin at the edge of tide water. But here and there were clearings, fish traps and the smoke of homesteads rising half a mile away behind the trees. Whenever they passed such places, crowds came down the river's edge to watch them.

Tros knew the ship looked magnificent, even though the oars moved raggedly. Vermilion top-sides, with a gold-leaf, undulating serpent above where the polished tin began, and the vermilion oar-blades—all were reflected in the water. The three great curved spars were as graceful as swallows' wings; and from the poop he could see the long bronze serpent's tongue that shot forth this and that way, quivering to every motion of the ship.

He knew, too, that there could hardly be a man in Britain who had not heard rumors, at least, of the great ship's building. Judging by the crowds that had come to stare at the ship on the ways—to laugh, sell, steal, obstruct and volunteer the information that a ship with metal on her undersides would never float, he had supposed the spectacle was too familiar in that corner of Britain to cause more than passing comment. He began to receive new education in the workings of the human mind.

At one point where the river curved so sharply around a mud shoal that he had hard work to find and keep the channel, two or three hundred men put out in small boats armed with tridents, spears and all the paraphernalia they used for despatching stranded whales. Whether it was the gold on the figurehead and the long serpent that they coveted or whether the sheer beauty and the hugeness of the ship aroused their prejudice against all novelty he never knew. They quailed before they came within their own short arrow range, and he supposed it was the crash of the drums and cymbals, as he called for more speed, and the flickering serpent's tongue that frightened them. At any rate, he left them easily astern.

But at another place, down-river, where the tide flowed swiftly between shoal and shore—the place where, in a bireme won from Cæsar, he had once caught a Northman long-ship beam on and had rammed her to destruction—there was evidence of well laid plans to wreck the *Liafail* before she could leave the Thames. They had felled great trees and staked them across the narrow channel, leaving a gap through which the tide poured at such an angle as to force any passing ship on to the longshore mud.

He backed oars in the nick of time and dropped two anchors over-stern, only to be greeted by a shower of arrows, many of which hummed into the planking of the upper deck. So he ordered the port bow catapult into action, lighted the fuse on a leaden stink ball and sent it crashing into the trees, where it failed to explode but set the woods on fire and burned with a stench that drifted on the light wind riverward and nearly threw the port side oarsmen into panic.

One stink ball sufficed; that and the crash and the hum of the catapult with the resounding flash and shudder of the serpent's tongue, so that it looked as if the serpent might have spat the burning stench forth. There was no more arrow fire. No longshore Briton showed himself. So Orwic was for landing with the Northmen and imposing penalties for evil manners.

"I know where their villages are. I will burn them and flog their headmen," he remarked, pulling on his little peaked steel helmet.

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But Tros, remembering the Lord Rhys, chose discretion. It was likely that delay would bring surprizes long prepared by Rhys who—if it was he who had planned to wreck the ship—would certainly have let fall hints enough to turn out all the countryside in readiness to loot and kill. A wrecked ship was in theory the lawful profit of the king who owned all river rights, including stranded whale and sturgeon, but in practise it was first come, first served, and the wrecker's trade was plied without distinction between friend and foe.

Tros lowered boats and sent two dozen Northmen overside to clear the passage under the protection of his catapults and arrow engines, and it was nearly dark before Sigurdsen reported all clear and the logs adrift. By that time the tide was beginning to change and it was risky work to navigate uncharted, only half-remembered channels in the gloaming. Tros dropped half a mile or so down-stream and, when he found deep water under him where the river began perceptibly to widen into estuary, he dropped anchor for the night, conscious, however, that as night fell he would lose all the advantage against river pirates that the awe inspiring serpent and the long range of his catapults provided.

One precaution that he took was to bend two warps to the big bronze anchor that he let go from the bow. One warp took up the strain, the other lay slack, sinking below water. Leaving Sigurdsen and Orwic on the poop, he himself took the anchor watch and lay down to sleep with the slackened warp under his neck, and with the port bow arrow engine cracked and loaded within reach, aimed so as to discharge twelve arrows straight along the warp at the first touch of the trigger.

Before long Conops wakened him, reporting oar strokes in the dark. There was no moon yet; it was impossible to see as far as twenty feet beyond the ship's bow. All was quiet on the poop where Sigurdsen was droning Baltic tunes to Orwic. The deck watch, ten men, paced to and fro like shadows, bare feet falling silently; there were no sounds except the tinkle and suck of the water alongside, the slight squeak of the spars and one other, hardly audible, that might be swish and drip from where the anchor warp met water.

"Shoot!" urged Conops.

But Tros was thrifty; he did not care to loose twelve irrecoverable bronze-tipped arrows without knowing where the target lay. Squanderer of gold-leaf and vermilion on the ship, reckless of the price of tin and royally extravagant of linen sails and cordage, it had irked him sadly to have to use one stinkball more or less at random. To have loosed twelve arrows without due reflection were a sin. He waited, listening—too long.

THE loose warp tautened suddenly and hummed. The tight warp slackened, cut through close to the water line. He pulled the trigger then. The quarreling arrows whined into the dark and two or three of them hit woodwork. Then a man screamed, like a wounded horse—frightful, sudden—an unhuman sound. A torch shone for a moment somewhere over on the river bank. Then rain that drowned the rising moon and drummed on deck, blotting out all other noises.

Tros did not dare to sound the alarm unless, or until he had work at the oars for the slaves to do. They were unarmed men, as liable to panic in the darkness as so many sheep. Nor did he dare to get up anchor before sunrise except as an absolutely last recourse.

"Turn out all the Northmen!" he commanded. "Station them along the bulwarks. Go you below, and if the slaves wake, keep them seated on the benches. You may have the two oar captains to help you. Run!"

Conops vanished and Tros, ears strained, caught the sound of approaching oars. Impatiently, biting his nails, he waited for the Northmen to turn out, and as one of them, ax in hand, came leaning into the rain to take his stand below the break of the bow, he sent him below in a hurry to the magazine to bring up one of the leaden stink balls. By the time a fire-pot had been brought, too, and the oil-soaked fuse inserted, there was no more doubt as to what was coming toward them on the rising tide. The longshore Britons had a barge all fenced about with wicker-work; he could hear the squeaking of the withes as well as the splash of at least a dozen oars.

So he lighted the fuse and held the leaden ball in both hands overhead.

"Man arrow engines!" he commanded, and the Northman ran to pass along the order.

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It took time to get the covers off the carefully housed engines; time for the fuse to burn down to the neck of the infernal thing Tros held in both hands. He had time to wonder what rash idiotcy Orwic would commit when a general alarm should split the night, and time to curse himself for having started on a voyage without assigning battle quarters to each Northman and inventing a system of signals by which to control all hands in darkness and emergency.

At last, before he thought the enemy was near enough, he had to fling the stink ball, lest it burst and kill him, aiming at the sound of oars and leaning overside into the rain watching the curved course of the spluttering fuse, shuddering then as a dozen arrows plunked into the woodwork all around him. But there was no splash. He heard the leaden weight fall hard, and instantly there was a burst of flame that threw a whole barge full of Britons into view, crowded so tightly together behind a screen of willow withes that they could hardly move.

They yelled and a volley of arrows screamed through the great ship's rigging, but the stink ball functioned perfectly without exploding. They could not go near it to throw it overboard; the heat melted the lead casing; the blazing chemical spread, setting fire to the barge, and in the reflected flare from that, the golden serpent's head stood forth—an apparition in the night!

Twenty, thirty hastily lighted torches came whirling through the rain on to the *Liafail's* deck, along with lumps of burning fiber, soaked in pitch and tallow, but the rain extinguished those. A terror-stricken Briton yelled that the serpent was moving toward them; and the barge, emitting clouds of yellow, green and crimson smoke, became a perfect target for the arrow engines.

Volley after volley screamed into the holocaust until Tros blew his whistle shrilly to stop the waste of arrows; blew it to small purpose because Orwic on the high poop kept on shooting as fast as he could lay the arrows in the grooves and crank the great yew bow.

The men on the barge were jumping overboard; the barge was drifting up-stream with the tide; there was no more danger from that source and the light from it, mirrored in pools on the river, showed dozens of smaller boats flitting away like phantoms. There was, strangely, little shouting; now and then a swimmer cried to the nearest boat for help, and some one in the distance, who appeared to be controlling the attack, bellowed through a tube of some kind.

"In again! It is only a wooden serpent! Attack from all sides! Cut the cable!"

It was a hollow, haunting voice.

Tros went to the poop, pausing as he passed to rebuke each Northman for an arrow wasted.

"Dogs! If you should have to buy the arrows, you would fight with lines tied to them!"

He shoved Orwic away from the poop arrow engine and bade Gildas cover it again.

"Great sport!" said Orwic, shaking the rain off the rim of his peaked steel helmet.

"Sport!" Tros came near to exploding with disgust. "Sport in killing poor fools who obey a rascal? Catch me that bellowing knave who cries the pack on, but keeps himself out of harm's reach! To work now! To a man's task! Sigurdsen! Lower a boat. Take axes, eight of your own men, Orwic, and his four. Bring me back that bellower alive!"

The boat went overside and Tros patrolled the deck, ears strained for warning of another attempt to creep down on him in the darkness. He could hear the voices of Conops and two Northmen threatening a thrashing to the slave who should dare to leave his oar bench, and he heard the oar blades rattle against the ports in readiness to be pushed out the full distance, so he knew he could get instant headway against the tide if the enemy should cut that second warp, though it made him shudder to think of losing a bronze anchor.

But the attack had evidently failed, and failed for good. He could see the barge, away up-stream, surrounded by a swarm of boats whose occupants were picking up survivors, keeping well to windward, and attempting to steer the gutted hulk into shallow water by shoving it with long poles.

Some one in a boat near the far bank kept on bellowing, but Tros could no longer catch the words, so he supposed the boat had begun to follow the retreat. But the bellowing ceased abruptly, and he heard one



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long yell mixed of fear and anger. Then silence and, after a while, the steady thump and swish of oars that he knew were his Northmen returning.

He ordered the ladder let down, but Orwic cried out for a rope. Four Northmen climbed the ladder and began hauling on the rope, hand over hand, in great haste, as if there were a hooked fish on the end. The rope shook, and from the darkness overside Orwic's voice half-laughed a breathless warning. Suddenly a thing flopped on the deck and struggled, slipping about on the wet planks like a fish. Orwic arrived up the ladder and pounced on it, heaving it upright—a woman! He ripped off the bandage that gagged her, letting loose her wild hair that fell in heavy, rain-wet coils. She threw her head back and howled once like a wolf, then bellowed, "Help! Help! Rescue!" in the selfsame booming voice that had directed the attack.

TROS clapped a hand on her mouth, and she bit him, drawing blood. He shook the blood off, ordered Sigurdsen to take charge of the ship, and pointed to the after deckhouse—the same place where he had had his interview with Rhys. It took four of the Northmen and Orwic to hustle the woman in there, she screaming and bellowing alternately, but presently they forced her on to the bench where Rhys had sat and lashed her arms to the wall. There by the light of the whale-oil lamp Tros looked her over.

"Gwenhwyfar!" he said, coughing up one of his monosyllabic laughs, and he shook off the blood from his hand again. His mind went back to the time when he had first set foot in Britain and Gwenhwyfar, wife of Britomaris, one of Caswallon's tributary chieftains, had made love to him, and cursed him afterwards for not responding to her overture.

"Aye!" she said, using her third voice, and it was quite unlike the battle bellow she had sent across the river, or the wolf-howl. It was low and pleasing, though it shook with anger. "I am Britomaris' wife and you are Lord Tros, who might have been king of Britain, but are only a pirate!"

Orwic whistled, grinning, wiping off blood from his handsome face where Gwenhwyfar had gouged him with her nails. Tros leaned against the table, sucking his bitten thumb and laughing silently.

"Where is Britomaris?" he enquired after a long pause.

Gwenhwyfar only glared, straining at the cords to test them. She was better than good-looking, even so, all dishevelled with the hatred in her eyes. She had the panther-like attractiveness that some men say is irresistible. The great amber ornaments heaved on her breast and her thin lower lip flushed crimson where her white teeth clenched it.

"If you have not made Britomaris, who obeys you, king of Britain, how could you have foisted me to that throne?" Tros enquired.

"You are a pig!" she answered, nearly spitting the word at him, and Tros laughed again.

"Yet you wished me to kill Britomaris and to marry you!" he commented, then grew suddenly rigid, for he heard a shout on deck.

But it was only the deck watch in the dark crying, "All's well."

"Is the Lord Rhys the man you favor for the kingship nowadays?" Tros asked, beginning to play with his sword-hilt, clutching and unclutching it as he often did when he had not quite made up his mind what to do. Gwenhwyfar did not answer and he nodded to himself.

"She is always looking for a man to ditch Caswallon. Caswallon laughs where another would have had her executed long ago. I suppose you won't kill her any more than he. What do you say if we keep her here till morning and then watch her swim ashore?"

Tros turned on him.

"Who says I won't kill her?" he demanded, scowling. "Kill her or send her to Cæsar!" he added, and his right hand came down on the sword-hilt with a whack that made the blood squirt from the bitten thumb. "Gwenhwyfar, it appears to me the gods have brought you into my hands in the nick of time!"

"Nay, nay! It was I who brought her!" Orwic laughed. "She clung by the nails to my face, or I might have lost her overside!"

"In the nick of time," Tros repeated. "Now—either you shall tell me what you know about the Lord Rhys' plans, or you shall go to Cæsar nailed up in a box. Cæsar,

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beyond any doubt whatever, would keep you to walk at his chariot tail when he enters Rome in triumph. After which you would be sold at auction to the highest bidder."

Gwenhwyfar only glared, and Tros made a mistake.

"In Rome they pay extravagant prices for fair-haired slave women," he said, "and Cæsar uses all expedients to fill his purse."

She did not exactly smile, nor did her eyes soften, but her chin rose half an inch. There passed over her a wave of pride at the suggestion that her price would be a high one. The half of Britain knew her as "Caswallon's scornling" because she had set her cap for him but he had chosen Mygnach's daughter Fflur. Having had perforce to satisfy herself with a chieftan for husband who was tributary to Caswallon and without more influence than weak men ever win, she had been burning ever since for one day, even for one hour of glory. Too late, Tros read her thought, knew that she could see herself the center of all eyes, in chains at Cæsar's triumph, then competed for by all the wealthy men of Rome.

"Nail her up in the Lord Rhys' water cask!" he ordered, knowing there was no use arguing with a woman while she dreamed such dreams as that.

She began to mock him, using words that made Tros set his teeth and brought the blush to Orwic's cheek. Wharf rat language would have left them utterly indifferent, but she said things of Tros' dead wife that pierced all sense of decency, as knives cut nerves. And when the Northmen loosed her from the rings in the deck house wall she fought them like a she wolf.

"She will never go to Cæsar," Orwic said, when they had carried her below and left her, acridly upbraiding, in the darkness. "She will sooner kill herself. Gwenhwyfar is no bird that can live in a cage."

"Has she ever been to sea?" Tros asked, and laughed.

He then ordered a mattrass laid on the poop, where he lay down to sleep until dawn. He knew what the morning would bring. He proposed to be ready for it.

At daybreak the tide was still making, and there was nothing to be gained by wearying the rowers. Stiff they were from yesterday's short effort, and ill-tempered because there was no milk for breakfast. They could see no sense in cleaning down a ship that still smelt of the new paint, and they objected to wet benches, to the herrings and bread served out to them in wooden bowls, to the draught through the oar ports and to being made to fold their blankets. They wanted to sit shivering with the blankets wrapped around them and, above all, they insisted they could row no more until the stiffness, that they thought was rheumatism, left their muscles.

So there was a little whip and a lot of swearing, before the anchor was hauled in at last and the glittering serpent's tongue began to flicker to the awkward oar-swing and the *Liafail* made headway to the sea.

Tros gave the helm to Sigurdsen and spent the first two hours inspecting blocks, sheets, halyards, stays, shrouds, and telling off the Northmen to their stations, while he conned the sky at intervals and hoped for a favoring wind. Not he nor, as far as he knew, any man had sailed a ship with three masts, and he would have liked a day or two to break the oarsmen in and get them used to ship-board before shaking down the furled sails. For he would need all his Northmen then to man the ship, and there would be none to spare to keep the slaves in order.

But he knew that presently he would have to use the sails or else anchor again, and the thought of losing time while Cæsar's Spaniards might be on the way, moved him to run all risks except such as were unseamanly.

SO HE set a man to splice the warp Gwenhwyfar's men had cut, told off the rest of the Northmen carefully, assigning each to the work best suited to him, went below for a while to watch Conops moving from bench to bench instructing oarsmen, then stood beside Sigurdsen at the helm to await the inevitable.

First came the wind, a steady, fresh breeze on the starboard quarter, good enough. And presently it heaped the flowing river into regular, smooth waves that swept under the ship and lifted her. Two score oarsmen endured that for a while, then ceased to keep time. There was blasphemy below deck because others, finishing their swing, were struck in the back by the oar handles of other men who groaned and vomited. The sick men swore

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it was the herrings they had had for breakfast. The word poison emerged more than once through the opened hatch.

Then, nearing the bar, where the river banks spread away into the distance and the curious, perplexing currents from the mud flats and mussel shoals went hurrying seaward, there were lumpy waves that changed the easy motion into roll and dip. Oar after oar came in then, resting with its blade just showing through the port, and the din through the open hatch was like the voice of the infernal regions where the souls of unforgiven men lament. Eleven oars still slapped the water in spasmodic jerks and Conops raised his one inquiring eye above the level of the hatch. He said nothing, but held up his whip at arm's length to draw Tros' attention.

"Cease rowing! Stow the oars!"

Tros' voice held laughter that had nothing to do with the slaves' predicament. His ship at last, his wonder ship should try her wings! It thrilled him as no fight had ever done, nor any sight of woman, nor even the thought of a finish-fight with Cæsar!

"All hands make sail!"

The words were Tros' orison to the keepers of his deep sea destiny, a challenge to his soul to make full use of him and ship and all he had, a greeting to the lords of opportunity. It was a big, bull-throated roar, heart-whole, that shook him as they say great Jove's nod shook Olympus.

Then he took the helm from Sigurdsen, and as the bellying sails were sheeted home he felt the thrill of the contenting sweetness of the ship's response. She steered to a touch, yet steadily. With creaking cordage and a boiling wake her serpent's tongue aflash in the golden sunlight as she plunged over the lumpy waves, she heeled to the increasing wind and raced for open sea.

Tros laughed. He had designed her right! His dream had come true, and the seas of all the world were his to conquer and explore! He wished he had bent on the purple sails with the great vermilion dragons rampant on them for this first voyage. But thrift had prevented that. The unbleached linen glistened in the sun like gull's wings, and for an omen, as the clean, tin-covered hull gained speed and he ordered the sheets hauled closer, be beheld a golden eagle soaring overhead, that circled thrice around the ship and vanished northward, effortless, climbing and climbing the blue, windy reaches of the sky.

"I am a man! I live!! I laugh!" he said, and with his fist struck Sigurdsen between the shoulder blades.

## CHAPTER X

### A LETTER TO CÆSAR

ONE at a time they sorted from between decks Britons who were not so seasick as the rest and put them to the deck work, four to a Northman overseer, trying them out, rope's-ending them a time or two until they learned to jump at the word of command and haul on a sheet all together. That set a few of the Northmen free for Orwic to experiment with. Orwic's genius was battle. He devised swift ways of getting up the ammunition from the magazines and studied how to aim the catapults, allowing for the pitch and roll.

In Orwic was no thrift. He wanted to use the loaded leaden balls for practise, even brought them up on deck and would have fired away a dozen without wondering where new ones could be had. He would have used the catapults without first greasing down the blocks and slides and the ingenious bronze levers that multiplied the speed of the falling weight. But Tros had foreseen that. He had provided stones that weighed almost exactly what the leaden balls did, and he forbade the firing of a catapult three times without regreasing.

So Orwic squandered stones and grease, and for a while, to the crash of the falling weights on basket work, the sea was spattered with wild shooting, until at last a hit was made on a floating piece of wreckage half a mile away, and the whole deck crew went frantic with delight. Tros inspected the wheels at the top of the thirty-foot uprights, examined the whole mechanism, ordered the wooden box work greased that guided the falling tons of lead to the basket work below, observed that the basket cushions took up the concussion without injury, and let them use up all the stones, appointing Orwic his artillery lieutenant and instructing him to choose the steadiest marksmen from among the Northmen.

Then, after a long look at the wind and sun, he went below to where the water casks were strapped in rows on chocks and, taking a whale-oil lantern, peered through a square

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hole into the end one, which had not been filled. He heard a groan.

"Have you had enough, Gwenhwyfar?" he inquired and knocked on the echoing cask with his sword-hilt. The answer was a curse, choked midway, followed by a louder groan.

"Will you go in this cask to Cæsar or will you come out now and tell me what I want to know?"

"Air!" Gwenhwyfar answered. "Air! I smother!"

Tros chuckled and struck at the cask again, bracing himself against the motion of the ship, not interested in Gwenhwyfar's cravings. He knew that, though the fire and water torture may not wring confession from a strong-willed prisoner, the motion of the sea will do it always, given time enough. In the dark, when the world goes round and round, all secrets come up with a stomach's contents. All that is needed is patience and a pair of ears.

"You have air enough, unless you propose to speak. But on deck it is very pleasant," he remarked. "The sun shines, and the motion is less disturbing."

"Pig!" she exploded.

But the effort was too much. He heard her vomiting. Then:

"Mercy!" she gasped and, between gulps, "Tros, pity me! Throw me overboard!"

He laughed.

"I will set you ashore at the first chance if you will tell me what I want to know," he answered, rapping on the cask again, for it occurred to him that probably the drumming din did not decrease discomfort.

The ship was "talking," as all newly built ships must, each plank and beam complaining of the changing tension. The dark hold was a sea of noises and immeasurable motion.

Gwenhwyfar groaned.

"Are you lying?" she asked, and vomited again.

"Not I. Nor yet bargaining for lies," Tros answered. "Tell the truth, or stay in here until—"

He paused because her hands clutched at the edges of the square hole as she dragged herself upright.

"Oh-h! This is worse cruelty than—yes, I will tell! The Lord Rhys promised to have Britomaris slain and to make me his own wife if I could wreck your ship. Now, let me out! Let me out!" she screamed. "I have told you."

"Tell me all," Tros answered, drumming on the cask again.

"Rhys heard Skell had gone to Pevensey. Let me—oh-h!—Tros, let me out! I can't talk here."

"You must. You shall come out when you have told me everything."

She fell to the floor of the cask again and groaned awhile, then presently got on her knees and spoke in great haste, as if to force out the words before her last strength failed:

"Rhys sent a man to overtake Skell, thinking I might fail to wreck you. The man was to bribe Skell to betray you to Cæsar, and unless Skell agreed, the messenger was to kill him. Oh-h! Let me out!"

She fell to the floor of the cask. Tros waited.

"Tell me every last word!" he insisted.

She spoke now from the cask floor, her voice booming hollow, like a ghoul's through a hole in a sepulchre.

"The messenger—oh-h! The messenger was to instruct Skell to find out where Cæsar will set a trap for you. Skell was to bring you a false message. There, that is all! Let me out!"

Tros thought a minute, drumming with his fingers on the cask, then pulled a hammer from the rack below the deck beams and knocked the cask-head loose. Then he reached in and lifted Gwenhwyfar by the arms, she groaning, and carried her up the ladder hanging limp across his shoulder. Presently he had a mattress laid on the floor of the after deckhouse and laid her on it, locking the door and stationing a Northman on guard.

"Wine!" he commanded.

A slave brought it, but he did not dare to trust a Briton in alone with her. Seasick or not, Gwenhwyfar was capable of influencing any slave not thoroughly on guard against her. She might corrupt the man by appealing to his sympathy.

Tros carried in the wine and knelt beside her, lifting up her head and forcing wine between the pale lips, spilling most of it, he having had small training in the bedside arts. The spilt wine stung her eyes, and a mouthfull of it choked her, but the strong stuff brought the blood back to her cheeks. She called him a pig again.

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"GWENHWYFAR," he said, "you missed greatness by the width of your ambition! I asked you last night, where is Britomaris?"

"He is nothing of yours," she retorted. But she sipped more wine and presently sat up, holding to the bench and looking scared and dizzy. Catching a glimpse of swaying sky through the deckhouse port, she gasped, lay down again and shut her eyes.

"I think Britomaris is all the husband you are ever like to win, Gwenhwyfar," Tros said pleasantly. "We none of us grow younger as the years roll on. Where is he?"

"I don't know," she answered, burying her face into the mattress.

Tros stood up and paced back and forth a time or two from wall to wall, pausing to glimpse through the after port at the poop and Sigurdsen.

"Rhys," he said, pleasantly again, "would only use you. Though he might cause Britomaris to be slain, he would never make you his wife. More likely he would have you slain, too, on a charge of treason against king and council, so as to seal your tongue. Rather trust me than Rhys. I am an honest enemy. Rhys is a false friend. Now tell me, where is Britomaris?"

She sat up again and stared at him, her eyes red-rimmed and watery, her lower lip protruding and her hair an uncombed coppery mass.

"Tros," she said, "I could have made a king of you!"

He answered—

"Where is Britomaris?"

"Gone!" she answered. "Gone to the west of Britain to meet Cæsar's men. Rhys bribed him. Britomaris is to trick Gwenwynwyn of the Ordovici, who is a coward of no account, on whom five hundred soldiers would be wasted. Britomaris is to meet the Spaniards to persuade their Roman officer and to lead them near to Lunden, where the Lord Rhys will join them with a thousand men and have at Caswallon."

"Not he!" Tros answered, hands behind him, throwing back his head in one of his discerning grins. "Rhys may raise a thousand men, but he will play both sides and await the outcome. He will help Caswallon if he thinks Caswallon wins and, after that, denounce poor Britomaris and yourself, claiming the half of your heritage for his reward! If he thinks Caswallon loses, he will join the Roman openly, cause Britomaris to be stabbed and presently denounce you as a public enemy, because you know too much about him!"

Tros stroked his chin. There was important information he must gain yet and he pondered how to go about it without letting Gwenhwyfar know she had a trump remaining in her hand.

"Gwenhwyfar," he said presently, "you have answered my questions, I think, truthfully. I promised I will set you free on shore."

"Soon! Soon!" she demanded.

"I will keep faith. But I remember we were friends once—you, I and Britomaris. I ate your bread that day I first set foot in Britain. Shame irks me that I need to see your ruin. I can save your Britomaris. Will you play him fair and be his wife and bide the laws of Britain if I pluck him out of this foul plot of Rhys and King Gwenwynwyn?"

She began to sob, her face between her hands, her body shaking in convulsive sobs. Tros' eyes smiled, but his face was sympathetic. He was sorry for her. Surely he was sorry.

"Speak. Shall I save him?" he asked again.

She could not speak. She nodded, and he hardly knew whether in truth she nodded or whether the sobs still shook her. He repeated the question.

"Yes! Save him, if you will. Oh, Tros—"

She turned with the swift motion of a snake and sat up suddenly to stare at him.

"If I had wrecked your ship and taken you alive last night, there would have been no more talk of Britomaris! It would have been you and I, or death for both of us!"

"As it is, we will save Britomaris," Tros commented, resuming his stride from wall to wall. He did not choose that she should see his face that minute and each time he reached the wall he turned away from her. "Where can I reach him?" he asked offhandedly.

"Duotomne,"* she answered, and caught her breath. She realized as well as he did that she had betrayed the secret of where Cæsar's men would land. "Tros!" she said. "Tros! There is a devil in you!"

*The modern Dartmouth.

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There was self-mastery at any rate. He did not laugh. His face betrayed no triumph, though his heart thumped. Now he need not trust to Skell! If Skell were dead or if Skell had accepted a bribe to lead him in the wrong direction, he could nevertheless find Cæsar's men infallibly. Nothing to do but to sail to Duotomne and await their coming!

"Tros!" she said. She had detected something like a gleam behind the amber eyes. "You will betray me now—now that I have told all? You will betray my Britomaris?"

He made one of those strong, slow, confidence-imposing gestures that revealed his character more certainly than words.

"Never," he answered. "I will beg Caswallon's favor for you both."

Another thought occurred to him, a blind guess snatched at random as the panorama of the past week's happenings passed swiftly across his mind.

"If you had wrecked me, would you have sent word to Cæsar?"

"Certainly," she answered. "Rhys would have demanded your head from me, to send to Cæsar in a basket. But if he had had it, he should have had mine, too! Ludd! What would Rhys have been to me if I had won you! I would have told Rhys you were drowned, and I would have given him your cloak, full of arrow holes, to send to Cæsar, bloodied up from other men's wounds. Rhys has a man in Pevensey who waits, all ready to sail to Caritia* with your head in a basket."

"You would have sent the cloak instead?"

She nodded.

"Aye. I love you!"

"I have an old cloak," said Tros. "Can you write?"

Gwenhwyfar laughed. The blood began returning to her pale lips and her eyes grew brighter.

"Aye, Tros, I learned that from the Druids."

"And the Lord Rhys? No? Then I will sign his name! Gwenhwyfar, you shall write to Cæsar. We will pin that letter to my old cloak, bloodied up and pierced with arrow holes."

She lay back, overcome again by nausea, but she smiled at him, nevertheless.

"Tros," she said, "Tros, you could have been a king!"

* The modern Calais.

HE DID not answer that but left her and bolted the door, stationing a Northman to keep watch through one of the arrow ports and to report her slightest movements to him. He knew her moods were as sudden as the seas before a veering wind. She would hate him again presently. The thought would torture her that he had won her secret without pleading. She was capable of jumping overboard or of setting the ship on fire or of murdering himself.

He took the helm awhile for the sake of the feel of the ship's response to it, and two or three times he changed the course to give the Northmen practise in trimming the sails. Then, giving charge to Sigurdsen again, he went to the hatch and looked down at the rowers, sprawling, vomiting between the benches; went forward to the galley where the cooks were in a like predicament; laughed and returned to his own stateroom underneath the poop, where for a while he studied his water clocks, three bowls with holes in them, that floated in leaden tanks and, slowly filling, sank, the first in four hours, the second in twelve hours and the third in twenty-four.

Presently he pulled out his third best cloak from a locker underneath the carved oak bunk and, with a wry face, because he hated to see good purple cloth destroyed—he had intended that cloak should be Conops' great reward after he himself had worn it a few more times—he tossed it into a corner. Then, cutting off a section from a roll of parchment, thoughtfully, he wrote a letter, pausing before each word because, though he had great facility with Greek and Latin, he had trouble with the spelling of the Gaulish words.

The motion of the ship, as he sat with elbows spread on the oaken table and his legs stretched out in front of him, made it a simple matter to disguise his handwriting. The scrawl looked as if some one half illiterate but with a good command of spoken Gaulish had done it by flickering torchlight.

To Cæsar, the Roman, in Gaul, greeting from the Lord Rhys of Maulden in the Isle of Britain, and from the Lady Gwenhwyfar, wife of the Lord Britomaris.

This according to our promise. The great ship built by Tros, the Samothracian, was wrecked on the bank of Thames by our contriving. There was a great battle by night and many arrows struck Tros. He, fighting furiously, weakened, and his knees gave under him so that he fell headlong and

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was swallowed by the water, being seen no more. Tide bore his cloak to shore and it was found at daybreak.

Therefore, there is no more the great ship to fear nor any danger to the Spaniards whom the Lord Rhys will await at Dortumne.

We await the proof of Cæsar's word. It was three talents for the head, but it was no more seen and we have sent the cloak as surety our work is well done.

Now send three talents by a trusted hand to Pevensey, whereafter all shall be continued as agreed between us.

Tros, after reading the letter a dozen times, signed it, "Rhys of Maulden," and left a space below that for Gwenhwyfar's signature. Then he took the cloak on deck and ordered Orwic to shoot arrows through it until it looked as if it had been through half a dozen battles.

Seasick men were butchering some equally seasick sheep for dinner on the forward deck. Tros drenched the torn cloak in the sheeps' blood, let the blood dry, then towed the cloak overside at the end of a line, with a bronze-tipped arrow caught by the barbs in the lining.

"Cæsar," he said to Orwic, "is a shrewd, lean fox, not easily deceived, but he will recognize the cloak by the gold braid around it, concerning the meaning of which he questioned me when I was his prisoner in Gaul. Now if Skell should have betrayed me and should be offering to lead me into Cæsar's trap, Cæsar may think I was slain since Skell left Britain, in which case he may send Skell to Pevensey with a message that the Spaniards are on their way. So we will go to Peyensey with all haste, but we will not wait there long.

"And it may be that Cæsar will see through this trick. That nose of his can smell a rat through solid masonry. And it may be Gwenhwyfar will yet betray me. But a wise man, Orwic, uses all expedients and overlooks no opportunity that the gods have thrust into his hands."

## CHAPTER XI

### DISCIPLINE

TROS had trouble with his topmasts. They were too tall. When he ordered topsails set that afternoon to take advantage of a steady breeze, there was too much leverage aloft for the ship's beam and depth. She steered unhandily, needing two strong men on the steering oar. And when the breeze freshened two top-masts snapped before the Northmen could get sail off or the men at the helm could bring the ship around into the wind.

So Sigurdsen said, "I told you so," which made Tros lose his temper, and there was other trouble besides. For instance, Orwic lost his head completely. The slaves below decks heard the sharp reports of breaking spars and, seasick though they were, began to storm up the hatch in panic that was increased by the changed ship's motion as the men at the helm hove her to. Orwic leaped to the hatch and defended it, drawing his sword, instead of letting the slaves surge through and find out for themselves that nothing serious had happened.

It would have been easy enough, on deck, to have laughed them out of their alarm and that lesson might have done good. But Orwic wounded three men seriously, driving the rest below and clapping on the hatch cover. The slaves made up their minds they were being herded to their death, and there was a riot among the oar benches that called for all Tros' mastery. They began to throw the oars out through the ports, there being not much other mischief they could do, until one bright genius suggested they could break the deck loose from the beams and force an opening to freedom.

So the oars that were not yet thrown out through the ports were turned into battering rams, and a pounding began on the deck that shook the whole ship. Whip was no use. Conops and the Northmen oar captains hurled themselves into the confusion, flailing right and left, but oar ends made good weapons, and they were driven backward to the ladder where Tros opened the hatch in the nick of time and rescued them, bruised and bleeding.

"Stink! Throw the stink into them!" urged Conops.

But Tros wanted oarsmen, not corpses.

"Open all hatches!" he thundered. "Sigurdsen! Below there with a dozen men, and drive the fools on deck!"

The Northmen plunged into the opening with capstan bars. The thundering ceased on the deck planking and the Britons began pouring out on deck, where they stormed the two boats, unlashing them from the rings that held them down on the oaken chocks, starting to drag them toward the davitts.

Tros, swallowing impatience, stood and

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showed them how to launch the boats, which, crowded full, were large enough to hold between them about forty men. They got in one another's way—as mad as steers, too mad to know whose voice advised. Tros signalled to the Northmen, who came up red-faced through the forward hatch; they charged down deck and broke the crowd up into two detachments, leaving a dozen or two frantically laboring at the boats. Once on the run the Northmen kept the Britons moving, driving them around the deck and herding them up forward. The remainder lowered both boats and swarmed into them, hand over hand down the falls. They had no oars. They had forgotten that. Tros ordered the falls hauled up and two short oars thrown down to each boat.

"Now stay adrift!" he roared at them. They had neither food nor water, and began to realize it. "Not a slave of you returns until you have picked up all the oars you fools threw overboard!"

For a while, pitching and rolling alongside, they sat in the boats bewildered. They were out of sight of shore. Above them the great ship tossed herself, two topmasts swinging by the stays, the loose sails thundering, the serpent's tongue flashing to right and left. But at last a man stood in the stern and cried:

"Brothers! See the color of the water! That way lies the river! Row for it! We will pick up long oars as we go!"

"Man the port stern catapult!" Tros thundered, his voice roaring clear above the thunder of the sails.

Four Northmen ran and cranked the weight aloft, and every slave in both the boats had seen what the catapults could do.

"Go and find those oars! Look lively now!"

Two short oars to a boat, they began to paddle timidly, afraid of the short waves that pitched and rolled them, more afraid of Tros and his artillery. Tros sent a Northman up to the masthead to shout directions to them, then went forward.

"Get aloft and bring those topmasts down on deck," he ordered. "Leave these fools to me!"

The Northmen swarmed aloft, and Tros stood looking at the Britons herded on the bow and on the deck below the bow. A few had armed themselves with odds and ends—belaying pins, capstan bars, wood from the cookhouse fuel box. They looked ugly enough, but the panic had left them. Some were still miserably seasick; three were wounded; nearly all had bruises, because the Northmen had used capstan bars to keep them moving. Orwic, and with him Gildas, came and stood behind Tros.

"Are ye ashamed?" Tros asked. He stood there hands on hips, his back against the foremast, looking like a man who knew his own mind perfectly, whereas he was not at all sure how to handle them. "Six of you, carry those three wounded fools aft!" he commanded.

They obeyed. A dozen made haste to obey, all too glad of a chance to get out of the storm that was coming. Tros had to herd back six of them.

"They're beaten!" Orwic whispered. "Better thrash them one by one!"

"Is that the way you school a horse?" Tros snorted, turning on him, showing fifty times more anger than he felt. Once more the gods had given him the proper cue! "Fool!" he thundered. "These are only scarelings. Shall I make them more afraid by beating them? If you can't learn to keep that sword of yours in the sheath until it's needed, you may leave me to manage my crew!"

Then, turning his back on Orwic, who chewed at his moustache and tried to look like a gentleman who had not received rebuke:

"Below there! Back to your benches! And mark this— If there's any more such foolishness, I'll chain ye to the seats!"

His gesture was magnificent, devoid of the remotest hint that they might dream of disobeying. At a jerk of his thumb the nearest men filed past him to the hatch and the others followed them like sheep, dropping their belaying pins and capstan bars quickly before he should see them. Tros stood conning them, his face a strong enigma. He was making sure that none had been too badly damaged by the Northmen's blows, but he did not let them guess what thought was in his mind. When the last of them had vanished through the hatch he turned to Gildas.

"GO BELOW with them," he ordered. "Talk to them. Laugh at them. Get them good-humored again. Let them know they are fortunate not to be slaves of a weak and revengeful master. Give them tallow for

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their bruises. Tell them any other man than I would hang each tenth fool from the yard arm as example to the rest. Be mother and uncle to them for a while, Then, when they've come to their senses promise them to try to coax me to let them have mead with their supper. Go!"

Then he turned on Orwic and read riot law, first principles for making panic-stricken scarelings into men:

"Stab, hang, beat. They learn you are afraid of them! You hot-head with your ready sword and dagger! Any fool can stab! That's their first instinct. Do you dam the river flood, or do you clear a course for it? Do you stand in the way of a bolted horse? Or do you run alongside of him and get the rein and pull him around in circles until he tires of it? Ludd's anguish! I have seen you break a team of horses and not use the whip once. Remember this—a man has more brains than a horse. Outthink him, if you hope to keep control! And take good care that when he thinks, he'll have an unexpected clemency to think about, but never a glimpse of weakness. Justice first, strength always! There is neither strength nor justice in a sword stab at a poor fool, afraid for his life."

"I regret what I did," Orwic answered, saluting him.

"Go and bury regret and don't do it again!" Tros retorted and turned away from him to watch the Northmen passing down the topmasts to the deck. Not for another five-and-twenty men would he have let Orwic see how satisfied he was. He knew he had accomplished more to discipline his crew than a whole month's uneventful voyage could have brought about. The twenty who were quartering the sea for lost oars would have a long look at the great ship on the water and would return with their minds full of it, to talk about it to the others, beginning to think of the ship with pride instead of as a prison.

But better than that was discovery how well the ship behaved when hove to. He had left the youngest of the Northmen at the helm, a youth not likely to have used much head work if the ship had fallen off the wind and filled away. But all the time that riot lasted and the Northmen labored up aloft to clear away the broken topmasts, the great serpent's head had curtseyed to the wind, swinging a little this way and then that, but never enough to fill the sails or make the helmsman work. She was a good dry ship, too. Not a gallon of solid water had come overside, although the waves were chopping up before a brisk wind crosswise of the tide, she was a steady ship, and weatherly. He judged she had worked to windward just about enough to offset drift.

So when Sigurdsen came down on deck along with the main topmast, grumbling, with a great deal more about his "told you so" and, stopping to secure the broken spar to the bulwark stanchions, talked back at Tros between his legs, his gloom proved uncontagious.

"Too much newness! Too much untried crazy stuff!" said Sigurdsen. "You should have listened to me. We laughed at a man on the Baltic who tried new rigs, and we called his wife widow before ever he put to sea. You will lose this ship yet!"

"Aye! Over the edge of the world!" Tros answered, laughing. "When you prove to me the world is square I will believe you about Baltic rigs. Meantime, we will rig new topmasts, shorter by two cubits and stayed aft as well as forward."

"And this having three masts is madness!" Sigurdsen went on.

But Tros, with the course in mind, knew fairly well how fast the ship had sailed and, well contented that the damage was no greater, squared his shoulders and went aft to bandage up the wounds of the oarsmen whom Orwic had stabbed. That was a messy business that his heart did not delight in, but the Druids had given him pungent stuff that smelt like tar for treating wounds and he attended to the bandaging himself because he could not afford to lose three oarsmen.

That done, he watched the boats come back with the recovered oars, observing that the crews had learned one lesson. They no longer feared the motion of the waves nor troubled when a wave top lipped over the bow and drenched them. Three or four were bailing leisurely, and some were singing. They reported they had picked up all the oars, and came aboard hand over hand up a rope with their feet against the ship's side, almost with the air of sailors, but not quite.

"Do not salute the poop, you dogs!" Tros roared at them. "You grinning wharf rats! Do you think my ship is a longshore stews that you can swagger into and pay down your money for a drink?"

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He made them stand there and salute him ten times running, just to train their memories. Then twice he made them lower away the boats again and haul them up evenly, snatching at the halyards on the run and swinging in the davitts handsomely. They went below all grinning at their newfound sea legs, but Tros stopped the man who had cried from the stern of the boat to the others about the color of the water and direction of the land. He gave him a red cord to wear around his neck.

"I appoint you first oarsman on the starboard side," he said.

The fellow grinned, saluted and departed down the hatch. He had expected to be punished. Orwic stared, then exploded—

"You reward him?"

"No. I recognize him. There are seeds of leadership in that man." Tros turned to the helmsman. "Let her fall off—easy now! This is a ship, not a four-horse chariot!"

THE Northmen managed the sheets and braces without a word from Tros, keeping their eyes on him, obeying gestured signals. For a while Tros watched the course, considering the wind, tide, current, then left Sigurdsen in charge and went back to the deckhouse where Geenhwyfar lay. He found her lying with her face still buried in the mattrass, looking like a drowned thing with her hair all matted. But she stirred as he entered.

"I heard riot. I hoped we were wrecked," she remarked, and hid her face.

Tros leaned against the table, fingers rapping his sword-hilt.

"Death, Gwenhwyfar, comes to all of us when we have played out part," he said. "The men who know about such things have told me there is a long rest after that and utter happiness before we come again into the world and finish what we left undone."

She turned her head swiftly and stared.

"So say the Druids," she remarked, as if weary of the talk of priests.

"I like to leave as little undone as I can," said Tros. "Have you seen a housewife who left dishes dirty until morning? Yeh, but that is a dreary day's beginning! I will start my next life without this one's rotten ropes to splice!"

She raised her head and stared at him again. "What would you have me do?" she asked. "You talk like Fflur, but you act like destiny! I tremble when you speak. I hate you! What would you have me do?"

"Act nobly!" Tros retorted. "All of us make errors. Let us strive to make our own like a king's and bear the blame and eat the consequences. I will set you free in Pevensey. I have a letter written and a cloak, shot full of arrow holes. You shall take both, and you may send the two to Cæsar or you may try once more to break me under the wheels of your revenge."

She sat up, elbows on her knees, head resting on her hands, her coppery hair a cloud around her shoulders. But between her brown fingers her eyes were watching him.

"You ask me to do you a favor?" she said at last.

"I bid you do yourself a favor—yourself, Britomaris and all Britain. So you and I will square our reckoning and hold no grudge between us when we come to earth another time."

"I like now better than another time," she answered.

"Now," said Tros, "is when we sow. Another time is when we reap. Shall we be friends or enemies?"

She dropped her hands and looked up straight into his amber eyes.

"Tros, you are too strong," she said. "You could conquer any woman's will! Be your friend, Tros? How can I? Have you any notion how a scorning feels?"

"Aye. Once or twice I have despised myself," Tros answered. "But I took care never to repeat the lesson. That is why I will set you free in Pevensey without conditions. I will not have your treachery for which to blame myself. You may be friend or enemy."

"If I say friend, will you trust me?" she answered.

He nodded.

"And if you say enemy, I will set you free nevertheless."

"Are you a very wise man or a fool?" she asked. "I know not my own mind."

"I am a man who speaks you fair, Gwenhwyfar."

And you bid me send a written lie to Cæsar!"

Her lips curled, not exactly scornfully but with a hint of malice. She believed she had him on the quick.

"Lie to Cæsar or betray me and let

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Cæsar's army land in Britain!" he retorted. Choose the lesser of two evils or the greater. Even as I choose between a fight with Cæsar and the chance to run away. I will play the man. Play you the woman."

"Tros," she said, "there is no gainsaying you! Very well, I will send your cloak to Cæsar."

She lay down again, burying her face between her hands and breathing hard.

"You will do well," Tros replied and walked out, fastening the door behind him.

## CHAPTER XII

### GWENHWYFAR YIELDS

THERE was many a delay before they sighted Pevensey, and Tros dropped anchor in the lee of the long sand flat that arose, with coarse grass shaking in the wind, between the harbor and the sea. There was a split sail with a patch on it, due to a Northman's carelessness while Tros slept. A chafed throat-halyard had parted and a falling spar had smashed the cookhouse roof. Deck water-casks had gone adrift in a three-reef gale, and there was a great gap in the bulwark where a rolling cask had broken through.

But the face of Helma on the figurehead still smiled and the long, forked serpent's tongue flashed handsomely to every motion of the ship. There was an eye-appealing smartness in the way the sails were clewed up to the spars; and when the oars came out to work up to the anchorage against the tide, they swung together as if a hundred-handed Hercules were prisoned under deck. There was no sound of the whip, no swearing, nothing but the clang of cymbals and the drum-thud as they dipped, vermilion in emerald and white, and swung, Tros with his baton marking time, beside the helmsman on the poop.

He did not choose to enter the port of Pevensey, and there were many reasons. First, the shifting sand banks with a tortuous course between them where a ship could take the sand bow-on before the lead came up. Second, it was late spring. Cæsar's fleet undoubtedly was in the water and, though Romans were no deep sea swallows —spring or summer they hugged port if admirals would let them—biremes might be cruising in the channel and a pair of them could easily have choked that narrow entrance into Pevensey. Tros wanted sea room. Given that, he feared no dozen biremes.

Then, again, he did not care to take his crew into a British port yet. They were too near home. It was a first rule of ship's husbandry to give the crew shore leave as often as convenient to save them from salt water boils, the scurvy, cramp and the depression born of oar monotony. But it was also a rule in any seaport to take a toll of all ships' crews, decoying them to hiding places, where they could be caught and reenslaved in due time, when the ship had sailed away without them. In a foreign port a man dared land his crew, because even a drunken oarsman reasonably treated on his own ship would hardly trust the promises of longshore tavern keepers. But near a home port, where the tavern keepers spoke their language, slaves were safest with a tide-rip hurrying between them and the land.

There was a risk, too, that, if he entered Pevensey, some fishing boat might sneak out of the harbor mouth, conceivably by night, and carry word to Cæsar that the great ship was afloat at last and cruising down the channel between Gaul and Britain. That would end all prospect of the Spaniards' sailing until Cæsar could send a fleet out to destroy the monster ship, of which so many rumors must have reached him. Whereas, at anchor, there in the very jaws of the long harbor entrance, although out of sight of Pevensey itself because the coastwise towns of Britain were well hidden from the all too frequent raiders, Tros could see who came and went. Provided the watch were wakeful, even in the night no fishing boat could pass to sea without his leave.

Last, given a fair wind—and at that season of the year the wind would suit them three days out of seven—the Spaniards could cross from Gaul to Britain at almost any point along the coast between dawn and dawn. If he should hear of them, he would want to waste no time nail biting at the tide or feeling his way foot by foot to sea, in darkness, between sand banks.

He had decided he would trust Gwenhwyfar, against Orwic's firm conviction she would play him false. It was against reason and he knew it. But he had the trick of intuition and had learned, by long experience, that reason is a rut-bedraggled

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hag, while intuition is a goddess who can see inside the houses, into men's hearts and beyond the hills and trees. Reason reckons yesterdays, but intuition tells about tomorrow.

So the Northmen went to work repairing damage, and the Britons cleaned ship, sanding down the decks, while Tros, with a lookout at all three mastheads, interviewed Gwenhwyfar for the last time. She was smiling and well-pleased with him because he gave her money liberally for the journey home; but he knew no wind changed swifter than her moods, and he was minded, if he could, to say a parting word that should stick barbed into her memory.

"If you can learn in this life to play fair, and to choose between friend and enemy, you might be a queen in the next life," he said, fixing her with his lion's eyes. He looked like a priest of Isis when he stood that way, still and smooth-browed, with the black hair straight over his forehead.

She did not answer. She stood waiting. British manners offered no alternative, so Tros embraced her, kissing both cheeks. As their hair met she, an arm flung tight around his neck, caught her breath, sobbing, laughing, whispering in his ear:

"I have lost you, Tros, but only this time! I will help you against Cæsar, and next time we live on earth—"

A half sob choked her speech. She thrust herself away from him, wet-eyed, and she looked older than Tros by ten years, but there was a bravery of youth within her still and something not contemptible in line and gesture.

"Like gods, we live forever," Tros replied. "Do what is right, Gwenhwyfar, and if fear assails you, face it!"

That came as close to a blessing as he ever gave to any one in words, for sentimental mouthings nauseated him. He did not know why he should pity, and a little more than like Gwenhwyfar, but he knew he did as surely as he knew that she, least of all women could ever make him captive either of her savagery or her charms.

He sent Orwic ashore with her in the longboat with eight Northmen and ordered up the slaves to line the rail by way of farewell compliment. But as he saw her rowed away, and in his heart knew she would not betray him but would spare no pains to ruin all her friends this once for sake of him, he wondered whether the gods themselves, in all their infinite and condescending irony, would stoop to use such means.

He blew a great sigh, like a grampus coming up to breathe.

"Well, I am not a god," he muttered, "and I think I have hurt her less that she was willing to hurt me."

## CHAPTER XIII

### NEWS!

BEFORE the next dawn following the afternoon when Tros dropped anchor off Pevensey, there were five small sailing boats made fast to the stern of the *Liafail*. Of the five, the first two had essayed to slip past by daylight, keeping to the shallow water on the far side of the channel. But one of the first things Tros had done was to take on a new deck load of flat stones, and to put Orwic to work at the catapult.

Within an hour the catapult crew had all the marks within reach so well ranged that they actually hit one flat stone with another on the edge of the sandy beach. So when two boats sailed by, ignoring signals, one had the mast knocked out of her and the second put her helm up promptly, coming alongside, scandalized to plead such innocence as only fishermen are guilty of, and none but madmen could believe.

Neither boat carried documents or anything that even looked suspicious, but their five-man crews denied that they knew who Cæsar was, denied that they had ever heard of him.

"Then stay here and be deaf a little longer!" was Tros' comment, and he put two Northmen into each boat to guard the ends of the ropes with which he tied them to the taffrail.

By night it was not so simple, especially before the moon rose. Lapping of the waves against the ship and the drone on the sand beach drowned all other noises, and it was so dark that from the poop Tros could scarcely see the mainmast. So he showed a light and lowered both boats, filling them with Northmen, who had orders to lie close in-shore on the far side and pounce on all who tried to pass. And one by one they brought in three more innocent crews of fishermen, not one gray-bearded innocent of whom had ever heard of Cæsar. Nor did they know how many more boats there were in Pevensey, nor who was Skell, the

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Northman nor Gwenhwyfar. They were quite sure they never had heard of Skell—so sure of it that Tros was quite sure they were lying.

"Nevertheless, I think I, too, would lie if I were in their case," he reflected, and he lent no ear to Sigurdsen's suggestion of a rope's end, nor to Conops' talk about the virtues of a knife point thrust between the toe nail and the quick. He fed those fishermen and waited.

And a little after dawn there came a sixth boat, rowed by two men with a third man seated in the stern. And that was followed by a seventh, under sail, that carried, by arrangement with Gwenhwyfar, her own red woolen shawl tied up to the masthead, streaming in the wind. So they let that sailing boat go by unchallenged and Tros, superstitious in his own way, laughed to himself to think it was the seventh.

"The sacred number—number of the gods!" he grinned, and waited for the rowboat.

From it stepped and climbed the hanging ladder to the poop, a man whose dull red beard stuck outward all around his face. He had a basket in his hand as big as those the women carried on their backs to Lunden market. He declared his name was Geraint but his beady eyes that peered over apple cheeks did not suggest that he expected Tros to believe that or anything else. He set the basket on the deck and stared at Tros and waited.

Tros poked at the basket with his toe a time or two, recalling in his mind the details of the system of communication he had settled on with Skell.

"How many eggs do you bring? When did you leave Gaul?" he asked.

"One egg," the man replied, who said his name was Geraint. "I left Gaul day before yesterday."

"One egg! Lord Zeus!"

Tros tore away the basket-lid and pulled another basket out, a third, and then a fourth from inside that.

"Four warships? And sailed yesterday?"

The man grinned amiably, as if he admired the way Tros ground his jaws together.

"Too much time wasted! Too late!" Tros muttered, wrenching at the lid of the last basket. It was fastened all around with fiber and not easy to remove. Sigurdsen, Orwic, Conops and Orwic's four retainers came and watched. Tros pushed the basket toward Conops.

"Use your knife," he ordered, and Conops slid the blade under the fastenings. Tros had turned away, hands behind him, staring at the open sea, his heavily ringed fingers clenching and unclenching as he ground his teeth.

How should he get men now? The Spaniards probably had landed yesterday in Britain and would be impossible to round up. True, he might catch Cæsar's warships on the way back, defeat them and take over the survivors of their crews, but—

A sharp exclamation from Conops made him turn again and stare. His eyes blazed suddenly. In Conops' hand, raised by the hair, was a human head.

"Skell's!" said Conops.

Sigurdsen pounced on the man, who said his name was Geraint, seized his wrists and lashed them tight behind his back. The man offered no resistance.

"Torture!" said Conops, pointing with his right forefinger at the ghastly face. Orwic shuddered. Tros, his eyes changing, stared at the man whom Sigurdsen had pinioned.

"You are not Geraint," he said.

"No," the man answered. "I am Symmachus. I am a Gaul."

Tros made a gesture of disgust.

"Put that thing back in all four baskets," he commanded. "Put a stone in with it. Sink it in mid-channel."

He turned on the man who now admitted that his name was Symmachus.

"You have your courage with you," he remarked.

The man smiled amiably.

"Cæsar said you are not a cruel man," he replied. "He said, if you should slay me you would do it swiftly. And he paid me well. He gave my two sons money and as much land as two teams of oxen can plough. We had nothing. I am well content."

"Are you a fisherman?" Tros asked him.

The man nodded.

"I lost my boat, and my wife died of the hunger."

"Symmachus," said Tros, "you may die or you may live. If you live, I will employ you. But if you wish to live, answer my questions. How came Skell to die?"

The man had no objection to relating all he knew. His comically amiable face, framed in the dull-red whiskers, beamed

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with satisfaction at the thought of getting off so easily. His story was as frankly told as if he were relating something that was no concern of his at all.

"GERAINT brought Skell," he said, "and Geraint sold him to the Romans, but Skell slew Geraint when he saw he was betrayed. I saw that, so the Romans took me for a witness, and I saw Skell brought up before Cæsar. I was within six paces of him, squatting on the ground before the great tent. Cæsar said to Skell, 'I know you!' But Skell said nothing.

"For a long while Skell was silent, although Cæsar asked him many questions. And I saw Skell put his hand to his mouth, but the Roman officer who stood beside him saw that too, and smote him in the jaw and, seizing him, gagged him with a sword-hilt, breaking some teeth. He pulled out a piece of parchment from his mouth and offered it to Cæsar, who smiled.

" 'You are a spy,' said Cæsar. 'You stand convicted.' But Skell said nothing.

" 'Torture him,' said Cæsar, 'and when he is willing to tell his story, let me know. There is no need to preserve his usefulness,' he added. 'You may put him to extremity. When we have his story we are done with him.'

"So they threw Skell to the ground not far from Cæsar's tent, and a black man came up who had a pot of charcoal. Hot irons were put to Skell's feet until he yelled so that Cæsar frowned and grew impatient, ordering that Skell be gagged, saying it was impossible to attend to important matters in the midst of so much noise. And after a long time an officer came to Cæsar, who said that Skell would now speak.

"So they carried Skell, he begging to be slain, and Cæsar, observing him shrewdly, said he would confer that favor provided the truth were told, and all the truth, without prevarication. So Skell told about the eggs he was to send you in a basket to signify when and from which port the Spanish troops were sailing. And he told about this great ship, speaking very swiftly because he wished to die soon and be free from pain. But Cæsar made him tell the story three times over. And the secretary wrote it.

"Then Cæsar, studying the tablet, made a gesture with his head and with his left thumb. So they dragged Skell away to the camp ditch at the place where the rubbish is burned, and presently they came back carrying his head.

"There was much joking after that, and laughter, Cæsar wondering whom he should send to you with that head in a basket in place of the eggs from a Spanish hen. And one said—he was a high officer. He wore a white cloak— 'it will not do now to send the Spaniards.' But it happened at that moment that Cæsar's eyes observed me where I still squatted in the dust outside the tent.

" 'No,' he said, 'it will not do now to send the Spaniards. Who is that man?'

"So they told him, and I was made to stand before him in the opening of the tent, he striking his teeth with the thumbnail of his right hand. Suddenly he asked me—

" 'Do you speak the Roman tongue or understand it?'

"But I pretended not to understand the question, being frightened. I began to beg of him in Gaulish, saying I am poor and have two sons but no more any fishing boat, having lost mine in the storm when I went to catch good fish for Cæsar.

"So he smiled, and when he had thought a while he began to bargain with me, until at last I agreed to carry Skell's head to you in a basket and to take all chances that you might slay me.

" 'But I think he will not,' said Cæsar, 'because Tros is afraid for his own soul and will not take human life if he can help it.'

"Then, having agreed how much money and how much land he will give my sons, he tried to catch me, asking suddenly, 'Concerning the Spaniards, what will you say when Tros asks you?' But though his words were Gaulish I pretended not to understand his meaning, being fearful he might call the bargain off if I should seem to know too much. I was anxious that my sons should have that money and the land.

" 'Did you not hear what Skell told me?' he demanded.

"So I admitted I had heard that. Skell had told his tale in Gaulish. Cæsar said—

" 'What then will you say to Tros about the Spaniards?'

"And I said—

" 'I know nothing of them.'

"He thought a long while, chin on hand, and at last he said:

" 'If I had ships to spare, I would send those Spaniards and not you. But since I cannot spare ships, I will have my little

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joke with Tros. It makes no difference what you say about the Spaniards. Say anything you please, since they will not sail. If Tros is still alive when you reach Britain, wait for him in Pevensey and give that head to him, pretending that you bring Skell's message."

Tros turned his back to hide a grin. He would avenge Skell! The poor knave had done his best to play the man at last. He did not blame him for confessing under torture.

"Shall we put back to the Thames?" asked Orwic. "No use going any farther now."

"Put that man Symmachus in the Northmen's mess," Tros answered. "He has done us a good service. Orwic, bring me Rhys' men from the fore peak."

Orwic hesitated. He knew his Britons.

"If you let them ashore in Pevensey," he said, "they will find Gwenhwyfar, and the next you know, she and they will be cooking up a mischief for you. You will have to use British harbors until you get more men and—"

"I will get more men!" Tros answered grimly. "Spaniards!"

"But we have just heard they are not to leave Gaul."

"Credulous horseman! Do you think Cæsar would have said they will not sail unless they will? If he had said they will sail, I might have doubted it! Bring me those fellows of Rhys'."

So presently, all blinking at the sunlight, weak-kneed from confinement, filthy from much vomiting in darkness, Rhys' men were lined up on the deck below the poop, and Tros addressed them arrogantly, standing with his legs apart, a hand on either hip.

"I held you hostages for your master's good behavior. Since sailing, two attempts were made to wreck my ship, and for both of them the Lord Rhys was responsible. Your lives are forfeit!"

They demurred, very weak and bewildered. They said they knew nothing of Tros' terms with the Lord Rhys, and nothing of his efforts to destroy the ship. They had been locked up in a dark place where food was thrown to them, and they had all been at death's door most of the time, so that they supposed the food was poisoned.

"As hostages, your lives are forfeited to me," Tros repeated. "But I will give you one chance for your lives. Can you fight? Are you willing to man my arrow engines against Cæsar's fleet if I give you your liberty afterward?"

They complained they were unfit to fight. They had no special quarrel against Cæsar. They were the Lord Rhys' men and needed his permission before they might offer their services elsewhere. Their bellies were all watery with sickness.

"To the oars then!" Tros commanded. "Ye shall work as slaves if ye will not fight freely! Shame on you! Your master played a treachery on me and on the Lord Caswallon. He has tried to sell his native land to Cæsar. Have ye no honesty, that ye refuse the opportunity to wipe that shame away? Such dogs as you deserve the lower oar bank!"

They replied that they were honest men, trained to use weapons not oars.

"Honest?" Tros looked them over one by one. "Orwic, take charge of them. See that they clean themselves on deck where the air can blow the stink away. Feed them. Then give them their choice between the arrow engines or the lower oar bank. If they choose oars, chain them to the benches! Sigurdsen, man the capstan! Haul short! Conops, take those five boats that lie astern of us, set their crews ashore and break a plank from each boat's bottom. We don't want any spy work done for Cæsar for a few days! Lars, Harald, Haarfager, masthead men aloft! Oar crews to the benches. Out oars! Ready for slow ahead to come up on the anchor! Cymbals and drums, stand by!"

Of all the certainties on earth Tros knew the surest was that Cæsar would be swift. If, as seemed proven, he was planning to throw Britain into discord by sending foreign troops to help one rival king against another, he would send them now, not wait for events to rearrange themselves. Already he had three days to man the ships since Skell revealed to him the discovery of Gwenwynwyn's and Rhys' plot against Caswallon. He would not be likely to give Caswallon time to oppose the Spaniards' landing.

The arrow-riddled cloak and the letter describing the wreck in the Thames would be in Gaul before night, for the wind was fair and if the sailboat men knew anything about the tide they could lay a V-shaped course that would bring them to Caritia at sunset. That news should be enough to make Cæsar act in any case, supposing that

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the Spaniards were not already on the sea.

As he worked the ship seaward under oars, with Conops crying soundings from the chains, his brain was busy with those Spaniards, for he knew Spain and he knew the difficulties that the Romans had in that forever turbulent and plundered province. He conjectured the five hundred would be levies who had not exactly mutinied at being brought to Gaul, but who were neither loyal nor safe to be brigaded alongside other troops. All Roman troops, including the Italians themselves, were likelier than not to mutiny if given much encouragement, and it was an old game for a Roman general to transfer disaffected portions of his army to some outlying district where their behavior toward the inhabitants might lead to trouble and thus provide an excuse for an expedition, loot and easy laurels for the general himself.

"If Cæsar thinks me dead, then I will soon have a ship full of good spirited men!" Tros told himself. "If those Spaniards are such firebrands that Cæsar is glad to risk them on any venture, then they're just the lads for me! Better spend time taming good men than waste it coaxing dullards! They'll quarrel with my Britons. Yes, and it'll do the Britons good."

He began to pace the poop, his eyes sweeping the horizon, then came to a stand again where all could see him.

"Done with the oars!" he roared. "Make sail! Taut on the port preventer stays! Deckhands to the sheets! Aloft there. Shake her down!"

He watched the big sails sheeted home, felt the ship keel to the wind with a white wake boiling from under her, and laughed.

"Gods, give me but the opportunity!" he prayed. "I'll make the utmost of it!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FIGHT OFF DERTEMUE

TROS made for Dertemue with all the speed his ship could show, experimenting with the sails, putting the oars to work whenever the wind dropped to less than a strong breeze, making his men sleep by their stations, watching his three water clocks, calculating, fretting and yet letting no man see that he was worried.

He kept well away from the coast of Gaul and anchored for the night under the Isle of Vectis, partly because he feared the tide-race in the dark but also because he suspected some of Cæsar's light ships might be lurking thereabouts, and to have fought them would have taken time, with the added risk that they might escape and carry the news to Cæsar that the *Liafail* was not wrecked after all.

Nearly all next day he had to use the oars, for wind failed, but when night fell, he carried on with all sail set considering the coastwise lights that burned not far above the level of the beach. Sigurdsen begged him to anchor.

"Wreckers!" he said. "All Britons ply that trade. They set those lights to tempt raiders on to the reefs, and now and then they catch a merchant ship."

But Tros believed he saw a system in the lights. They were too bright, spaced at too regular intervals, and did not look innocent enough to be wreckers' decoys. They were signals. He had often seen what care the Roman navigators took, when about to cross uncharted water with a fleet of ships, to send men in advance in the liburnians to build great bonfires, near the headlands as much as possible, but in any case in a long line to guide them to their destination if the fleet should become scattered in the night. They would follow the long string of lights until there were no more of them, and know by that that they had reached their port, when they would wait until dawn should show them the harbor entrance.

He did not know how far it was to Dertemue, but he knew the length of the southern coast of Britain more or less, and he was beginning to learn to judge the ship's speed, though it was so much greater under sail than he had ever dared to hope it might be that he hardly trusted to his calculations yet. Even without her topsails she would boil along with a following or a beam wind, the clean tin-coated hull reducing friction to a minimum. And she would sail faster and closer into the wind than any ship he had ever known. However, they had toiled a whole day under oars, the half of the time against the tide, so he kept well out to seaward of the longshore lights, and doubted when he reached the last one, doubted that that really could be Dertemue.

He took a sounding, but the water was too deep, and he laughed at Sigurden's suggestion that they should use the oars and



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work in-shore in search of anchorage. Orwic agreed with Sigurdsen.

"If that is Dertemue, we should be ready to enter the river mouth at dawn, and so catch Cæsar's Spaniards as they enter."

"They never shall enter!" said Tros. "My genius is best at sea. Cæsar's on land. I wait here."

So he shortened sail and hove to; but he did not wait long before the masthead lookout cried that he heard cordage creaking in the dark. Great banks of clouds obscured the moon and there was wind enough to fill the rigging with the sea-wail that deadens hearing. How a Northman could hear cordage creaking through all that sound Tros found it hard to understand; he leaned far over the taffrail, straining eyes and ears.

The Northman warned again, and the man at the helm said something about ghosts in an awe-struck undertone. But at last Tros' eyes detected blackness blacker than the night, considerably lower on the water than his own great ship, not more than half a cable's length away. There were no lights, nothing but that spot of utter darkness and a mere suggestion of a sound that did not exactly harmonize with the orchestra of sea and wind.

Rhys' men who had made their choice without much hesitation when the wind had blown the sickness out of them were sleeping by the midship arrow engines, ready for Orwic to captain them when an engagement should begin. The catapults were useless in the dark, but every Northman had a bow within reach in addition to his ax and dagger. Twelve of the big stink balls had been set on deck in Conops' charge, the oil-primed fuses ready to insert, a firepot and a torch stowed under cover near-by. Below, the drowsy rowers rested on oars indrawn until the blades lay on the ports all ready to be thrust out at a signal.

Tros looked sharply at the shore, and then at the spot of darkness. It was moving very slowly seaward, not toward the coast. It was therefore not a Roman ship. The moon was behind Tros' back as he leaned over the taffrail; clouds obscured it, but the sky was a shade less dark there than in any other direction. Therefore, obviously, since Tros could see the approaching ship, however dimly, whoever was aboard her must have seen the *Liafail*. Yet the ship came on.

"They believe I'm a Roman," Tros muttered.

He turned to the Northmen beside him and ordered—

"Stations! Silence!"

The Northmen vanished on the run, with Orwic at his heels and there was presently a stir below deck where the sleepy oarsmen were awakened, followed by the clanking of the arrow engine cranks. Somewhere forward, Conops rolled a stink ball closer to the bulwark.

Hove to, the *Liafail* was drifting gradually seaward, away from the approaching ship, almost bow-on to the stranger, whose captain, likely enough, if he could see three masts, might think there were three ships in the darkness. Suddenly Tros cried aloud in the Roman tongue.

"Ho there! Is yonder port Dertemue?"

The answer came in Celtic—

"Are you Horatius Verres with the Spaniards?"

"I am admiral of Cæsar's fleet!" Tros answered. "Come along."

Some one on the approaching ship could understand the Roman speech. She changed her course that instant, looking almost ridiculously undersized and awkward as she came near enough for Tros to see her outline. He touched the helm, not taking it, but guiding the Northman's hand.

"Stand by to grapple!" he roared suddenly. "Out fenders!"

He thought of his new paint even in that crisis, and swore suddenly between his teeth, for as usual, Orwic let go a flight of arrows without waiting for the word. There was tumult aboard the other ship. They put the helm hard over trying to go about, their shrouds missing the great serpent's tongue by inches. It was clumsily done, but it saved them from a second of Orwic's volleys.

"Cease arrow fire!" Tros roared, his hand on the helm again, and a second later there was a crash as the bower anchor and a great eight-pronged grappling hook beside went down on to the small ship's deck, splintering the timbers.

"Who are you?" Tros demanded, and for as much as sixty breaths there was no answer. Sigurdsen came running aft to report that the grapnel held and that six Northmen were on the small ship's deck to make sure none should cut it loose. Tros bade him take the helm and keep the ship hove to.

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"Who are you?" he roared again, and this time an indignant voice answered him:

"I am Britomaris and a pilot with me. Is it so you treat your friends?"

Tros laughed.

"Come aboard, Britomaris! Come befor I sink you, ship and all!"

He threw a rope ladder overside and Britomaris climbed it, standing before Tros startled and indignant.

"Tros?" he said, bending his head to peer into the darkness.

Tros looked like a big black shadow on the poop.

"You thought me sunk in River Thames, now didn't you!" Tros answered, chuckling. "Ho, there! Bring a lantern, some one."

By the light of it he studied Britomaris, wondering that a man so good to see, who stood so upright in his furs and handled a spear so stately, should be such a moral weakling as he knew this man to be.

"You are caught in the act, Britomaris," he said. "Do you know of any reason why I should not take you to Caswallon?"

"Do you dare to fight me, Tros?" asked Britomaris. It was his only possible way out, but he did not look as if he liked the prospect, and Tros laughed.

"You are a prisoner. I don't fight prisoners. Give me that spear. Now the sword. Now the dagger. So." He threw the weapons on the deck, where a Northman gathered and examined them. Do you know of any reason why I should not denounce you to Caswallon?"

Britomaris tugged at his mustache, attempting to look dignified but plainly worried. The Northman who held the lantern grinned at him.

"No answer? Well, I will tell you a reason. Because I have promised your wife Gwenhwyfar. I have told her I will save you from this infamy."

"Told her?" Britomaris stared at him.

"Aye. She and I turned friends at last. When do you expect the Romans?"

"Now. I thought you were—"

"Landlubber!" Tros interrupted. "When saw you a Roman ship like this one? Blind mole! How many ships will the Romans bring?"

"Two full of Spaniards. Four biremes to protect them."

"Who said so?"

"Caius Rufus, the Roman."

"When did he come?"

"Since nightfall, post haste in a liburnian to bid us light the beacons and to have a pilot ready. He said Cæsar had moved with his wonted suddenness since learning that Tros is dead."

"Zeus! But that fellow is swift!" Tros said admiringly. He had to admire Cæsar, though he loathed him and all his works. "Gwenhwyfar's message saying I am dead, with my cloak and a letter to prove it, can hardly have reached Gaul before sunset night before last, and now—aloft there! Use ears and eyes! The wind's against them. The Romans will come rowing!"

"They will come with lights," said Britomaris.

The man had no resistance in him. He was as plastic in Tros' hands as if the two had been master and man for a generation.

"Caius Rufus said they will burn a lantern at each end of the spar of each ship. Will you battle with them, Tros?"

"You too!" Tros answered. "You shall boast to Gwenhwyfar that you played the man this once! Forward with you! Into the deckhouse and take Orwic's orders!"

"Orwic?" said Britomaris, and his jaw dropped.

"Aye! Caswallon's nephew, Orwic! If you stand up like a man behind the deckhouse wall and twang a bow like a brave man fighting in the open, Orwic shall tell Caswallon that you struck a blow for Britain! Gwenhwyfar may be more contented when she learns that her husband feared no Roman, even though he fears her! You offend me! Fall away!"

So Britomaris let a Northman lead him to the deckhouse, and Tros sent Conops overside to clear away the grapnel. But he took no chances with the smaller ship that still might have warned the Romans in time.

"Have they oars?" he asked. "Then cut away their rigging! Send their sail up here!"

The Northmen's axes answered. They even chopped the mast away.

"Out oars now, and off home with you!" Tros roared down from the poop when Conops and the Northmen had returned to their own ship, dragging a good linen sail with them.

IT WAS an hour before the labored thumping of the oars died away in the direction of the shore. Another hour before a Northman at the masthead shouted that he saw lights

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to the southward. Tros himself went to the masthead then. He counted twelve lights, several miles away, scattered in pairs over a considerable breadth of sea. And he studied them for a long time, trying to determine which might be the ships containing Spaniards and which the escort.

He knew the Romans were extremely poor hands at keeping station on the open sea. Likelier than not the ships were all mixed up together, their commanders satisfied to keep within sight of one another, not anticipating an engagement and confident that they would receive ample warning of the presence of an enemy.

No lights showed on the *Liafail*, but Tros knew that her bulk and her three great spars would show up plainly as soon as dawn should begin to steal along the sky. It lacked an hour of dawn yet and the wind had dropped. Glancing shoreward he could hardly see the beacons. It seemed to him that their crimson flare was being veiled and was spreading on the veil the while it grew dim.

"Fog!" he muttered. He had asked the gods for opportunity!

He returned to the poop and sent for Conops, Sigurdsen and Orwic.

"We will let that fog drift down on us," he said. "And if it comes not fast enough we will row toward it. When the Romans can no longer see one another's lights they will start their war trumpets a-blaring. They will low like full cows at the milking time, and we will pick them off one by one. Their system is to crowd an enemy between the beaks of two or four ships or to lay alongside and drop their dolphins into her and to let fall a gangplank with a spike in it, that pins both ships together and across which their boarders come with locked shields.

"Now they cannot use that gangplank, because our deck is higher than theirs. But they can break our oars, and they can use the iron dolphin, since it hangs from the yard arm. Above all, we must avoid their beaks.

"Orwic, their commanders will not stand at the stern, as I will. They will fight their ships from the top of the midship citadel where the sail, which they will keep spread whether there is wind or not, masks them from an enemy, and whence they can shout to the helmsman as well as direct the javelin and arrow fire. So aim first at the citadels and keep those swept with a cross fire from the arrow engines.

"Sigurdsen, take you the helm. See to it that the sails are well clewed up, but ready to be sheeted down with all speed if a wind should come and blow the fog away. This fog, which the gods have sent, is better than forty men for us."

But Sigurdsen was a pessimist.

"It will make the Romans close their ranks, and we will have to fight six ships at once," he grumbled.

"It sets all Northmen free for the fighting, since neither side can use sails!" Tros retorted.

"Aye, and we under-oared, with a half-trained crew! There are nineteen men so weak from vomiting they can't pull their weight, and if the ship rolls —"

"Clew up the sails!" Tros snapped at him. "Then come aft and take the helm."

The giant went forward, grumbling to himself, but Tros had come to understand the pessimism of the man, who once had been a petty king up somewhere on the Baltic shore. He liked to set all gloom in a dense formation and then wade into it like a disk into the skittles.

"Conops," he said, "the catapults are useless until fog and darkness lift. You and Gildas pick the four best Britons and stand by to serve stink balls by hand. Let the Britons light the fuses. You and Gildas each toss one ball at a time into an enemy's hold, if they come close enough. But no waste, mind! That stuff costs money. Not more than two balls at a time into one ship."

For a long while after that they lay in silence, rolling leisurely, watching the advancing lights grow pale against the brightening cloud bank to the southward, the big ship drifting very slowly on the changing tide toward the fog that crept toward them from the shore. The first outreaching wisps of it surrounded them as dawn touched the southerly clouds with gold and turned the edges of the mist to silver. Now they could see four of the Roman ships distinctly, and the masthead man reported two more following. Tros bit his nails, for the mist was still only in wisps around him, and he feared the sun gleaming on the golden serpent might betray his presence too soon.

There was no question in his mind now as to strategy. The four ships in the lead, less

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than half a mile apart, were armed biremes. According to the masthead man's report, the two-ship convoy trailed a long way in the rear. He must get between the warships and the convoy and engage the biremes one by one, avoiding all collision and yet steering close enough for Conops to lob stinkballs into them. And that would not be easy. Conops and Gildas could hardly toss the leaded leaden balls much farther than an oar-length. And though, if he should smash the oars by coming too close, he had plenty of spares ready; he knew very well what a panic there would be below decks when the broken oar ends knocked the rowers off the benches. He must avoid that even at the cost of letting more than half the enemy escape him.

A breath of warm wind brought the fog rolling down on him in clouds at last, and presently Tros heard the war horns blaring on the Roman ships. His chief anxiety just then was that the fog was moving too fast; if it should be one of those narrow, longshore streaks that hug the coast of Britain most days of the year, it might vanish too soon.

"More speed!" he demanded, leaning overside to listen for the horn blare. "Starboard a little, starboard!" he directed. "Hold her so."

Then he took his stand where the drum and cymbal men below the poop could see the wand he held in his right hand. But he made no signal to them until the blare of the nearest horn came from nearly dead stern and a Roman, aware of the thump of what he thought were pilot's oars, hailed him through the fog.

Then action, swift and resolute! He signaled to the cymbals and a crash of brass shook all the oarsmen into life. The water boiled alongside and the ship swung with a lurch as Sigurdsen leaned all his weight against the steering oar, his left foot on the rail and his muscles cracking.

"STAND by all! Ready on the starboard bow there, Conops! Fire when you see them, Orwic!" He had one bireme by the stern, at any rate. No danger from the dolphin, almost none to the oars if Sigurdsen kept his head. He signaled the cymbals, quickening the oar beat. The man at the masthead yelled incomprehensibly. There was a terror-stricken, flatted chorus from the Roman trumpets and the bireme loomed up like a ghost.

"Zeus!"

Tros threw his weight against the helm, or a bank of oars had gone to splinters. The air twanged as if the devils of the underworld were plucking death's harps, whistled as if death were on the wing, four midship arrow engines, and then Orwic's voice:

"Reload! Ludd's blood, what are you waiting for?"

Yells from the bireme, two thuds as the leaden balls struck woodwork, Conops crying, "Two hits!" and the ghost was gone. Fog, but a glare in the fog and the shouts of men who struggled to extinguish flame but choked in the stench and were forced back by the prodigious heat! Fog, and the blare of horns ahead. Shouts and a thrashing of water where another bireme came about to find out what the matter might be.

"Stop oars!"

The drums and cymbals crashed in sudden unison that checked the oars in midswing. Tros let the great ship carry way and for a minute listened to the Roman oar beats, knowing that his silence would confuse the Romans and that his own man at the masthead, being higher, would see sooner than the Romans could. Astern now, there was a crimson splurge like sunset in the fog, where a bireme burned.

"Right on us! Straight ahead!" The masthead man lapsed into Norse again.

"Beak! Their beak's right into us!" yelled Conops from the bow.

But the Roman helmsman saw the serpent's tongue in air above the bireme's bow and changed course in a panic. The ships struck shoulder on and, in the crash that threw the oarsmen off the benches, none heard the leaden balls thud down the bireme's forward hatch and roll among the rowers. Conops' voice cried:

"Two hits! Back away, master! Back away!"

The arrow engines twanged, and the Romans came back with a hail of javelins. There was a great splash, for they let the dolphin go and it missed by the width of the roll of both ships as they reeled back from the impact.

Javelins again—*twang*, *twang*, and shriek of the twelve-arrow flights; a din below decks as the rowers of both ships rioted. The Romans had the better discipline, but there was stenching fire in their hold,

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whereas Tros' men were only bewildered. Crash of Tros' drums and cymbals signalling for back oars; the choking, acrid reek of greenish-yellow smoke, emerging from the bireme's hatch; response from the oars at last. As the Northmen plied their bows from anywhere on deck and Orwic's arrow engines, cranking, twanging, screaming, swept the bireme's citadel, the reflection of a crimson flame lit on the serpent's golden tongue. Its agate eyes shone. It appeared to laugh as, curtseying to the swell and the staccato jerk of backed oars, it retired into the fog.

Tros laughed. Two biremes reckoned with! Two crimson splurges in the fog, and only two more ships to find and fight before those Spaniards were his!

But suddenly he swore. The fog was lifting! He could see the shore already and the burning biremes were in such full view that the crew of the nearest began manning the ballista that was farthest from the flame. An arrow two yards long feathered with burning pitch hummed overhead, and a second fell short as the backed oars took him out of range.

There were wounded Northmen on the deck, but he had no time to spare for them. In another minute now the hurrying mist would vanish and reveal him to the other biremes and to the ships that carried Spaniards. He ordered—

"Stop!"

And quicker than the echo of the drums and cymbals he was off the poop and down the after hatch, where he stood and roared to the rowers, taking care that laughter, triumph should beam from his face:

"Good men!" There were half a dozen of them stunned between the benches. "Two big ships beaten by your steadfastness! When I call for speed, let oars bend! Ye have done well. Now do better!"

In an instant he was on the poop again, his eyes searching the fog's afterguard that still concealed him from four Roman ships.

"Orwic!" he roared, and Orwic's boyish face appeared in the deckhouse door. "Man the bow catapults! Leave Gildas to the arrow engines. Conops! Stand by Orwic!"

Presently, to the sound of grinding, great weights rose between the uprights and the magazine crews, rolled the leaden balls into the racks provided. Conops began fitting fuses, soaking them with sulfur and oil of turpentine. Tros ordered Sigurdsen to shake down the great mainsail. He could spare no men for more than that, just yet. And as the big sail bellied in the wind the last fog streamers scattered southward, showing all four ships, and him to them.

The apparition of Tros' great vermilion-sided *Liafail*, with three masts and her long-tongued serpent flashing in the sun, struck terror in the Romans. They knew not he was undermanned. Two biremes, widely separated from each other and at least two miles away from their crowded convoys, bouted helm and ran for it, clapping on all sail to help the oars and striving to get between Tros and the Spaniards.

"Full speed!" Tros ordered as the clumsy convoys fell away before the wind, running straight for the southern skyline.

A race began in which Tros was badly handicapped. Because, if he had clapped on more sail, he would have had no men to spare to serve the catapults.

Along two legs of a skalene triangle, its apex the slow convoys, Tros and the biremes raced, Tros with the shorter course, but they, with full crews, going nearly two to his one. Around them and about them splashed the stink balls, as the great weights thumped into the hold, outranging the Roman ballistas easily, but making no hits. Tros ground his teeth at the waste of precious ammunition.

He ordered, "cease fire," ordered the great forward lateen sail sheeted down, thinning out the catapult crews to the point where they were hardly men enough to crank the weights, ordered the oar stroke quickened until there was so much splashing that he had to slow it down again. And in spite of all, the biremes gained on him hand over hand, until at last, while the leader raced on to tranship the Spaniards from the slower craft and carry them back to Gaul, the other turned and offered fight.

It was the act of a bold sea captain. Obviously no solitary bireme had the slightest chance against that great ship boiling down on him. The terrific speed had tired the Roman's rowers, who had hardly strength enough by now to give force to the iron-shod ram. Tros changed the helm and kept away from him to westward.

"Fire both catapults!" he ordered.

One missed but the other, laid by Orwic, hurled its lead ball straight against the bireme's citadel, smashing through the woodwork and exploding. Then the Roman

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captain changed his mind. His ship on fire, he turned in a wide circle and began to race again toward the convoys.

"Try again, Orwic!"

Two more balls whirled on their way, and again one missed, but the second—Conops aimed it—smashed through the bireme's deck and, though it did not burst, the cloud of suffocating smoke increased. The oars collapsed, like the legs of a dying centipede, as the whole crew, marvellously disciplined, went to work to extinguish fire.

"They are mine!" laughed Tros, his eyes fixed on the convoys.

But that other, swifter bireme lay already beam to beam with the nearest of the two-bellied transports. They had lowered their spiked gangplank and a stream of armed men poured along it to the roof of the bireme's citadel. Before Tros could prevent, both forward catapults went off with a crash and shudder. Two of the leaden stink balls hit their mark, one into either ship. Orwic, Conops and the whole deck crew went frantic with delight as both exploded. There was an instant blaze too great for Tros' explosive to have caused; one ball had burst into the Roman magazine, where they had stored their own pitch and sulfur, and both ships with their crowd of panic-stricken men, were swallowed in a reeking cloud of many-colored smoke, shot through with flame.

Tros changed the course to pursue the second convoy. Then he went up forward and took Orwic by the throat.

"Hot-headed horseman!" he swore, forcing him backward against the catapult. "Those last two shots have cost me ten-score men!"

He shook him, but he could not take the laugh off Orwic's face.

"Look! Ludd's teeth, but look!" he exclaimed and, breaking away from Tros' grip, watched the two locked ships, one mass of flame and sinking.

Tros took no pleasure in the sight. His eye was on one bireme to the northward that had managed to subdue the fire in her hold and was picking up survivors from another bireme nearer shore. The third, a mile this side of them, was losing its fight with the flames.

"Get aft!" he ordered Orwic. Then he ordered both the catapults uncranked, and told off men to care for the nine wounded—arrow and javelin wounds, not good to look at and not easy to treat. A Northman screamed and bit the deck beside him as they pulled out a barbed arrow-head and poured hot tar into the wound.

"Conops!" Tros commanded. "You're the one man I can trust. You yourself take one stink ball and stand up there in the bow. When I lay alongside those Spaniards have the fuse all ready, but don't light it until I give the word. If I do, then drop it into their hold to scare them out."

Again he went down through the hatch to encourage the rowers. Sigurdsen sent a messenger to say they were almost within arrow range of the ship they were pursuing. Then he went up slowly and stood staring over the stern. The capture of the last ship was a foregone certainty. It hardly interested him. It hardly troubled him to see the Romans burn and drown, for they were trouble hunters with the game reversed on them. But it grieved him to the deep, strong marrow of his being to have lost two hundred and fifty Spaniards.

"Good, spirited, unruly rebels to a man!" he muttered. "I could have given them their chance. The gods gave me mine, and I let Orwic rob me!"

Sigurdsen nudged him.

"Carry on!" Tros ordered. Then, when they were beam to beam with the slow, helpless ship he ordered the oars in through the ports and roared to the ship's captain to come about and heave to, setting the example. The man—he was a long-haired Gaul—obeyed him, and more than two hundred blue-eyed Spaniards, armed with swords, spears, shields and javelins, crowded the deck, more curious than frightened, while others tried to surge up from below but were prevented by the crush.

"Where is your commanding officer?" Tros asked in the Roman tongue. The Gaul laughed drily.

"They threw him overboard," he said. "He did not please them."

"How so?"

"They are hungry. There was no food."

"Sigurdsen! Lower away the boats!"

When both the boats were in the water Tros gave orders to the Spaniards to throw their weapons into them. A few splashed overside, but presently the boats came back with swords, spears, javelins, shields and helmets, loaded to the gunwale. Then he ordered a hundred Spaniards brought from ship to ship, which was as many as he dared

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to have at one time, until he had subdued them properly. Next, he put a small crew of Northmen aboard the Gaulish ship and passed a tow rope.

"There is one Roman bireme still afloat," said Orwic, pointing. "She runs home."

"Let her! We will have our hands full with these Spaniards. Let the Romans go and tell their tale to Cæsar!"

A great Spaniard swaggered up to him.

"Who are you?" he demanded, not exactly insolently. He was curious and, beyond the ordinary run of mortals, proud.

"I am admiral of Cæsar's fleet!" said Tros. "By right of my appointment I transfer you to my ship. Get forward!"

And the Spaniard went to sit and whisper with his friends and watch and wonder.

## CHAPTER XV

### MEN—MEN—MEN!

IT WAS a long pull back to Vectis, with a favoring wind but one-third of the time and a heavy, sow-bellied Gaulish freighter in tow, One hundred Spaniards were put to the oars, but they refused work, although they understood oars, were not seasick and, in a blue-eyed opportunist fashion of their own, were not unreasonable.

Tros sent for the man who had first accosted him when captured.

"Who—what are you?" he demanded, and the man, whose muscles stood out like molded ivory, smiled with a kind of traditional dignity, as if life were something that his ancestors had borne and he supposed he, too, could tolerate it.

"I am Jaun Aksue of Escual-Herria,"* he said in Gaulish. "There was fighting in my country, between us and the Romans. Their proconsul set a trap and caught a thousand of us, of whom he slew one-half. The rest of us he sent to Cæsar to help fight the Gauls. But we prefer Gauls to Romans, and though Cæsar armed and drilled us, we did nothing except to steal weapons for the Gauls and help them in various ways. So Cæsar decided to send us to Britain. How does it come about that you are admiral of Cæsar's fleet and yet attack the Romans?"

"Were you not a Roman soldier and yet helped Rome's enemies?" Tros answered.

"True enough. And I would have helped the Britons. We Eskualdunak† are not such fools as Cæsar thinks."

"Then you and I are of one mind," said Tros. "It is because I am not such a fool as Cæsar thinks that you are now my prisoner."

"We Eskualdunak are not good prisoners. We are worse slaves," the man answered. "You have enough slaves on this ship without increasing trouble for yourself. What do you propose to do with us, O Admiral?"

Tros, stroking his chin, studied the man.

"Are you these men's leader?" he asked.

"In a sense, yes. They elected me to lead them. In our land there is no such thing as servitude. All Eskualdunak are noblemen. But Cæsar's officer degraded me for what he said was insolence. We threw him overboard," he added casually.

Tros listened, but his inner ear was on the *qui vive* for the voice of intuition. He did not propose to cut in halves another opportunity by having to use force where argument would better serve. But he needed the right argument.

"Will you go home?" he asked suddenly.

"Not we! The Roman proconsul, Livius, would crucify us all, unless we should take to the mountains. And we are a sea-faring folk. We hunt the whales. But Livius burned our ships."

"Will you settle in Britain?"

"Who knows? You have a marvel of a ship. We might sail with you, if you should make it worth our while."

"You shall, if you will make it worth my while!" Tros answered. "Of what value is your word?"

The man looked straight into Tros' eyes.

"To you? Why, just the value that you set on it," he answered. "I never supposed it could have a market price. No more did Livius, the Roman, or he surely would have taxed it at a tenth. How should a man sell his word?"

Tros grinned. He liked him.

"Jaun," he said—and Jaun meant nobleman, a title that all men of that race prefixed to their names; but Tros did not know that, and the word was easy to remember—"I am the master of this ship. I am obeyed. And I am minded that you Eskualdunak will make a good crew. But I must have your word on it."

"Whither will you sail?" the man asked.

"Whither I will."

"How much will you pay us?"

* Basques.
† The country of the Basques.

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"As much as I see fit, and for the present, nothing except food and clothing. My men prosper as I prosper, sweat and starve, too, as I sweat and starve, save that I take the master's end of it and sweat the hardest."

"Are you an equal among equals?"

"By Zeus, No! I am master of the ship!"

"I like you," said Jaun Aksue. And he spoke with dignity, as if he had conferred a boon that were his to refuse, were he minded. "I will speak about this to my friends. If we agree to serve you, we will serve. You will not sell us to the Romans?"

"I will sooner die," Tros answered. "But mark this, and remember it: I will also rather die than not be master of my ship. It is I who confer favors, and the price is full obedience."

"I will speak to them of that." Jaun Aksue went down into the hold.

It was an hour before he returned on deck and then, with Tros' permission, went swarming along the towrope, taking his ducking in the bight and climbing on to the Gaulish vessel with a nimbleness that forced unwilling praise from Conops, for Conops disliked to believe that there were seamen half as handy as himself. At the end of another hour he returned in the same way, swung himself up over the poop and stood dripping before Tros.

"We accept," he said simply. There and then Tros dubbed him Jaun and gave him the rank of a lieutenant under Sigurdsen.

SO AT last they reached the Isle of Vectis and dropped anchor under the lee of chalk cliffs between the island and the mainland. All three banks of oars on either side, Britons and Spaniards alternating, had been in full use for a day and there was a new energy, a new, clean finish, a new majesty to the measured swing and a deep-sea certainty about the plunge of the vermilion blades that made Tros' heart thump.

Orwic espied Caswallon first. He lowered a boat, taking his own four men and some of Tros' slaves, hurrying to meet the clumsy barge that labored out of harbor under sail and sweeps. Orwic was shouting the news before boat and barge met, so Fflur and Caswallon knew most of it already when they both embraced Tros on the *Liafail's* high poop, Fflur's eyes frankly wet, Caswallon praising the great ship to hide his own emotion.

"Men!" said Tros. "I have men!"

"Aye, and I peace! Rhys is dead. I slew him! Came Gwenhwyfar, hot-horsed, blurting out the whole of Rhys' plot. Fflur coaxed me to spare the woman, but I slew Rhys. Some said to catch and torture him, but Rhys was of the council. I would almost as soon torture my own son. I sent him warning and he understood. He took to the forest with twenty men, hoping to reach Gaul, but when I overtook him his men threw down their arms. Rhys he drew bow but missed me by that much."

Caswallon measured off the third part of his thumb nail and Fflur shuddered.

"My arrow went into his heart," he added, "so he died in fair fight, and the council was not dishonored. I found letters on him, written by Cæsar's secretary. He and Cæsar had it all planned, but I think that Cæsar will not invade us now that Rhys is dead."

Tros did not answer for the moment. Then Fflur saw Britomaris standing by the deckhouse door, bow and arrows in his hand as if to advertise the fact that he had fought against the Romans. Fflur drew Caswallon's attention. Eyebrows raised, he questioned Tros.

"A poor fool," Tros said, "and his wife will manage him. I tamed Gwenhwyfar."

Caswallon laughed.

"She is as tame as the wind! But we endure the wind. I think you have tamed Cæsar. What is it? Four biremes sunk?"

"Three. A fourth escaped. Cæsar will learn whom he may thank for that reverse. What of Rhys' men whom I held hostage?"

"All Rhys' property is mine. I give them to you. Hah! How Cæsar will be chewing flints in Gaul! Three biremes and—"

Tros interrupted him.

"Caswallon, listen! Mend your fences! For love of you and Britain I will go to Rome, where I will do my utmost to throw sticks in Cæsar's wheel. But if I fail, then mark you, Cæsar will invade as surely as we see each other and are not dreaming!"

"We must pray more to the gods," said Fflur.

Tros' amber eyes looked straight at her.

"The gods," he said, "make opportunities and look on. Prayer is seizing opportunities. Believe me, Cæsar prays! Do you think I prayed for Spaniards? Maybe. Pray you for a stout heart, wisdom, and the men, men, men!"

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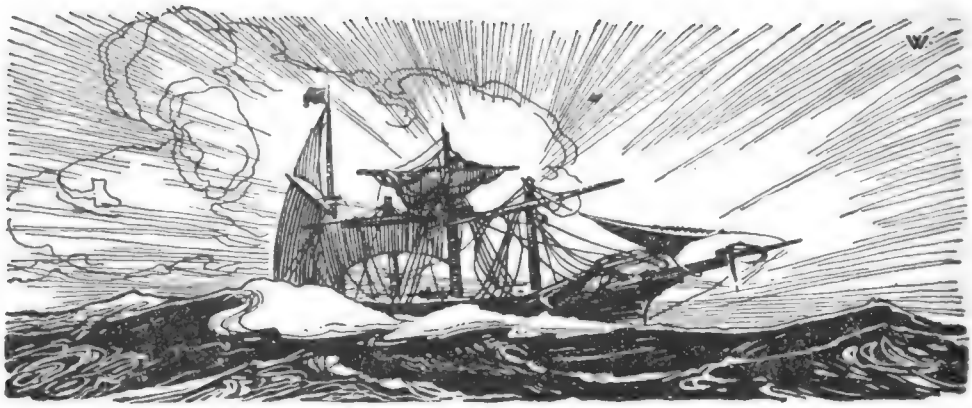

# The ENSIGN

A Complete Novelette

By Bill Adams

*Author of "The Helmsman of the* Mandarin," *"Old Sea Flower," etc.*

THE four-masted bark *Marchaway* rolled heavily and, pitching with swift declensions, lifted from sea hollows with impatient motion. No white cap shone on the expanses of the tropic sea as jet-black night gave way before the South Pacific dawn. Vast swells, round-topped and sluggish, rolled toward the east. Low on the eastern sea the sky looked murderous. The western horizon was clear, no cloud or wisp of cloud visible in the opening spaces of its blue heaven.

There was no evidence of life aboard the *Marchaway*. Her abandoned wheel kicked.

Upon the ship's forecastle head lay a tangle of twisted top-hamper. The foremast was snapped off below the cap, and the topmast that had stood above it was completely gone. The sole fore spars remaining were the lower yard, which swung to and fro upon the remnant of the mast, and the royal yard, which lay across the forecastle head.

All that remained of the main was the main yard and main lower topsail. Above the latter the topmast ended in a jagged stump. The mizzen lower mast stood, with the lower yard still crossed upon it; but all else gone. The jiggermast and topmast were intact.

From the remaining spars of the dismasted bark a few rags of canvas flapped, conspicuously white against the blue of the west and the ensanguined eastern sky. At her peak there floated, idly in the flat calm, the ensign of the merchant service. It gave to her an air of peculiar and unmistakable defiance, as though she were both conscious and proud of the banner that adorned her ruin, and were in her own being akin to whatsoever defiant spirits had hoisted it.

Of the two boats that had lain upon the forward deck-house but a few splinters remained. The starboard quarter boat was completely gone, and had evidently been swept bodily to the sea, for the davits were lashed inboard. Its cover still secure upon it, the port quarter boat lay unharmed upon its skids.

At the moment that a flaming sun leaped from behind the dark cloud banks to the east, a solitary man appeared from beneath the forecastle head and looked aft along the ship and with close scrutiny at the horizons. Returning beneath the forecastle head, he looked into a locker room within which two sailors reclined upon an old sail.

"The blow's over," he said.

"Vot you sees, Mike?" asked one of the sailors, a wide-framed, tall-statured and fleshy but hard-muscled man upon whose large face was a contemptuous scowl.

"Nothing," said the other. "We's all as is left."

The third sailor sat nonchalantly upon the canvas, his eyes on the speaker, who, without another word, returned to the deck, whither the big man followed him. The third man rose, and one behind the other

*"The Ensign," copyright, 1925, by Bill Adams.*



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they ascended to the forecastle head and looked at the empty horizon. Then they went aft along the main deck in single file, the big man between the others and Mike leading the way. They passed the forward deck house abaft the foremast and the midship house abaft the mainmast without pausing. The doors of both houses were either missing entirely or hung on smashed hinges; the crew's quarters forward and those of the apprentices amidships evidently deserted. From within each house came the swish of water that flowed to and fro with the roll of the ship.

Ascending to the poop the three sailors again stared at the rims of the heaving sea; then, having passed through the chartroom, went down to the deserted saloon, which was awash with ankle-deep water. The skipper's cabin was empty, as were those of mate and second mate.

For a time the three stood beneath the port quarter boat, the big man and the man who had first appeared on deck conversing in low voices while the third sailor stood nonchalantly by, looking up to the boat.

Evidently acquiescing in a determined plan, the three commenced to clear the boat away, ready for lowering. To lift her from her chocks they were compelled to take the davit falls to one of the quarter deck capstans.

By and by the lifeboat hung clear of her chocks and they prepared to swing her out, over the sea.

In the port side of the apprentices' house abaft the mainmast a lad of sixteen raised his head from the checkered pillow of one of the bottom bunks and stood a moment later on the deck. He searched the lockers and, having discovered a piece of ship biscuit, sat down at the table and munched it.

Another apprentice awakened, in an upper bunk.

"Got the grub, Byson?" he asked; then, a dismayed expression crossing his face, exclaimed, "I guess there isn't any grub!"

"Eet 'as been blow like zee ——, ee'snt eet Tayne?" asked a yellow-haired boy who rose upon his elbow in the other bottom bunk, and the fourth starboard watch apprentice looking down to the last speaker from the bunk above exclaimed— "Alphonse, you fat frog, did you just find that out?"

Two apprentices entered from the port side of the half deck, the foremost saying to the last speaker—

"Some mess, eh, O'Brien?"

"Her sticks are all gone, aren't they Smithy?" replied O'Brien.

"Zass ees long way to my 'ome," said Alphonse.

"Where's Polly, Burford?" asked O'Brien of the other port watch boy.

"Asleep still," answered Burford, and added, "Who's watch on deck is it anyway?"

Since the beginning of the hurricane that had dismasted the *Marchaway* there had been no counting time.

"What are we going to do?" asked Tayne; and Burford answered, nodding toward the port side of the half deck— .

"That's up to him. He's the oldest hand."

O'Brien looked into the port half-deck.

"He's dreaming he's just passed for master," he said, and added, "I wonder how far it is to land."

"Eet ees long way to my 'ome," said Alphonse, and, while some laughed at the Belgian boy's mournful face, one said—

"Rouse Polly out!"

Polly Thompson, the eldest apprentice of the bark *Marchaway*, snored deeply.

"RISE and shine!" cried Tayne, shaking him. "You're skipper now, Polly!"

Thompson rolled over and, pushing his long black hair away from a pair of still sleepy eyes, looked down to them.

"What's the joke?" he inquired innocently; then a serious look came to his pale gray eyes.

"There's no one left but us," said one of the apprentices.

"What'll you do, Polly?" asked Tayne.

"What do you suppose?" said Polly and, sitting up in his bunk, rubbed the end of his big nose while they all looked at him expectantly; little Byson, the youngest hand, very white-faced.

"I bet there isn't a boat left," said Burford.

"What do you want with a boat?" asked Polly, and ceased rubbing his nose to stare at Burford.

"We could get to Valparaiso maybe," said Tayne, and the eldest apprentice, a sneer in his voice, said, "So we could!"

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"Perhaps Iquique's nearer," said Smith.

"Don't be a lot of asses!" ejaculated Polly Thompson.

He leaped from his bunk and, shoving them aside, made for the deck, Smith asking as he did so—

"What'll you do, Thompson?"

"Take her to Falmouth," said the eldest apprentice, a new tone in his voice.

As they followed him out to the deck, one of the apprentices laughed, a low, hard laugh with the ring of youth's defiance in it.

They stood in a group at the foot of the mainmast and stared at the wreckage of *Marchaway*.

"I haven't seen any of the men since noon yesterday," said one.

"They're all gone," said another, and added, "The last of them went over the side with the fore topmast, and both mates with them."

Ejaculations of dismay escaped the younger apprentices, and of surprize that the bark still floated.

Polly Thompson stepped toward the bulwarks, and looked aft.

"Come aft!" he ordered, and they all hurried aft at his heels.

With extreme effort the three sailors had the bow of the lifeboat swung out and were now about to swing her stern over the water. They started at a voice behind them.

Polly Thompson, a steely look in his large gray eyes, said—

"Swing that boat to her chocks and lash her down!"

The three sailors stared at the eldest apprentice for a moment, then the man named Mike said—

"You go clear to ——!"

Polly Thompson's right fist shot out, hard as the knob on the end of a Zulu's knobkerrie, and the man dropped, but was on his feet again immediately, to rush at the apprentice, in whose eyes was now a stormier light than the bright, clear light of the new tropic day.

When, leaping to his feet again, half-blinded from a second blow, the sailor struck O'Brien, who stood eagerly by, Thompson said—

"Leave him to me, Pat!"

"Kill 'em, Olaf!" hissed the sailor, and the big, fleshy man drew his sheath knife and made for the boys; the third man looking on nonchalantly.

"Pins—take pins!" shouted the eldest apprentice, and the other boys, all but little Byson, followed the example of O'Brien, who, his back to the mizzen fiferail, already had a belaying pin in his hand.

The huge Olaf, about to strike young Byson, let his arm fall; his wrist beaten upon by the pin in O'Brien's quick fingers.

"Try some one nearer your size," sneered O'Brien, his belaying pin uplifted.

Three times the sailor named Mike had gone down, and now, upon his feet again, glared at the eldest apprentice.

"There's plenty more, Michael," said Polly Thompson.

The sailor turned to Olaf, who, the knife in his other hand, now circled about before O'Brien.

"Belay it, Olaf!" said Michael. "Belay! Belay!"

"I didn't suppose you'd quit the old hooker, Michael," said the eldest apprentice, and the sailor blasphemed comprehensively.

"I didn't know as any of you boys was left, Thompson," he said.

"Well, what about it now?" asked Polly Thompson.

"Whatever you says, sir," answered the sailor.

"Stop that big fool then," said Thompson, nodding to Olaf who still danced forth and back, his knife uplifted, seeking to get at O'Brien without meeting the belaying pin again.

Michael, flinging himself on Olaf from behind, bore him to the deck, and wrenched the knife from his fingers.

As the big man rose to his feet Michael said—

"Mister Thompson's skipper here."

"Go forward all of you," ordered Thompson, and the three sailors walked forward; Olaf shoving his knife into its sheath and jabbering voluminously to Michael beside him, while the other followed at their heels.

The apprentices swung the boat back to her chocks and lashed her down. When that was done Polly Thompson said—

"We'll go take a look in the lazaret and see how the stores are."

They went to the cabin, where doors hung on smashed hinges and water washed to and fro. When Thompson opened the closed door to the steward's pantry he said—

"Good! no water here."

They lifted the hatch leading from the pantry to the lazaret and passed below, to

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wait there in the dark while little Byson went for a lantern.

"Fair enough," said Thompson. "We'll eat anyway. Alphonse, rustle up some cabin biscuits and make us some coffee, eh? We've got to get busy."

They went to the galley, to wait till Alphonse had the coffee ready. The coal in the cook's locker was soaked, and Polly called to Michael—

"You men get some coal up from the fore peak!"

Sailors and boys stood by the galley door eating cabin biscuit and drinking good coffee, while Thompson, pannikin in hand, went to the poop.

Big Olaf asked—

"Vot we goin' to do eh?"

"Falmouth, like I told you," said Michael.

"Falmouth," said one and another of the appreatices.

"You iss all crazy!" snorted the huge sailor.

"Save yer breath," said Michael.

When Thompson returned he called Michael aside.

"You and Tibbits and Olaf start in to clear the wreckage on the fore," he said, and while the boys busied themselves in the strewn gear of the mainmast the men went forward.

The swell was going down rapidly; the bark riding with less labor.

They toiled throughout the morning, while the blue sea grew still, and by noon had a foresail set and fore and aft sails on the lower stays. While a faint air from the eastward steadied her, Byson, the weakest and most easily spared, held the wheel and she pointed her boom toward the south, moving, though imperceptibly, upon the long road to Falmouth. The tropic sun blazed on her. The pitch between the deck planks sizzled; the air filled with a hot scent of metal and of woodwork, of cordage and canvas that dried in the glare.

At noon they ate boiled pork and hard tack, all seated in a row in a narrow strip of shade under the wreckage of the mizzen; Thompson taking the wheel while the youngster rested and ate with the others.

They devoured their food in silence, none but Olaf speaking. Olaf said, contemptuously—

"Vee don't nedder gets to Falmouth."

Having eaten, they returned to their labors, and, cutting torn wire, unraveled thousands of feet of twisted rope, and salvaged blocks. Boys on deck called in the clear tones of youth to their fellows laboring above in the disheveled rigging. Olaf's voice from the foremast was a deep, surly bellow; the voice of Michael sharp, hard, distinct as the voice of an old bronze bell. The third man, scarce speaking, worked with infinite precision, patiently, but as though without expectation of thereby serving any useful purpose.

AT THE coming of eve they ceased their labors, to sit, when they had supped, under infinitely bright stars that appeared to smile to them; stars that whirled and twinkled about the summits of jagged masthead; above a ship that, riding on an even keel, was barely steering.

Little Byson slept, exhausted and without having eaten, on the cabin skylight, stretched out before Smith, who steered sleepily. The sailors smoked, seated on the railing, the huge man between the others, their three pipes red sparks amongst the low stars; the clear tones of Michael now and again audible, and now and again the surly tones of the big man, who said, over and over, like a child repeating a prayer—

"Vee don't nedder to Falmouth gets—"

When the helmsman cried— "Light on the starboard beam!" all rose to their feet, and Polly Thompson went to the chart-room for binoculars.

The green sidelight of a north-bound ship blinked, and was lost to reappear and blink again.

Olaf went to the poop, Michael following close.

"Dere is a sheep, mister!" said Olaf, his figure bulky at the ladder head, and Thompson, turning to him, said, "Get forward!"

"Vee gets picked oop now," said Olaf; to which the apprentice answered, "Get where you belong!"

"You asks for help, mister—for help, by gar!" shouted Olaf, and the apprentice strode toward him.

"Get!" he snapped, and, backing down the ladder, the sailor cursed him, shouting, "You keels us. You —— fool poy—you asks for help now, see!"

He drew his knife as the apprentice stepped down the ladder toward him, and Michael, seeing the star-glint on the knife blade seized his wrist.

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"Take him forward, Michael," said Polly Thompson.

They struggled on the quarterdeck; until Michael drew back a fist and drove it square to the big man's chin.

While Olaf rose to his feet, the other struck a match and lit his pipe; saying—

"I ain't had a smoke all day, an' now you're spoilin' it. Are ye goin' to be a white man, Olaf?"

While Olaf went forward, Michael returned to the poop where the apprentice walked up and down, wondering if he'd ever bring the *Marchaway* to Falmouth.

"D'ye want a hand on lookout, sir?" asked the sailor.

"I'll keep lookout up here, and call one of them to relieve me by and by," said the apprentice.

So Michael went to the forecastle head, where, on the lookout man's customary station, he lay down, one eye half open and the rest of him asleep—to keep lookout with the skipper of the *Marchaway* along the Falmouth road.

The boys slept, outstretched on the bare decks. There was no sound but the low ripple that came now and then from the ship's sides, and the occasional creak of wreckage still uncleared.

In the forecastle Olaf sat on the edge of an empty bunk, beside Tibbits.

"Dey is all sleeps," he said.

"Aye. Wot of it?" said the other.

"Might be vee could build little raft. Anudder sheep will pass and peek us oop maybe."

"You're crazy," said Tibbits.

"Vee don't nedder gets—" began Olaf, and Tibbits interrupting him, said—

"Ah, bide yer time!" then rose and left him, to sleep on the open deck.

After pacing restlessly forth and back awhile, the big sailor lay down and went to sleep.

AT MIDNIGHT Thompson wakened O'Brien to relieve him, and called another boy to take the wheel.

Michael, roused by the striking of eight bells, sat up, and turning, stared long toward the poop, dimly outlined against the spaces of the low north.

Thompson slept in the chart room. O'Brien, seated on the water butt before the jiggermast, nodded and presently slept also.

The boy at the wheel steered in a trance, unconscious of all but the lighted compass card before him.

Michael walked aft, and seeing O'Brien's drooping form from the quarterdeck ascended to the poop.

"Them boys is all done in," he said. He went to the helm and, laying his hands on the spokes, said—

"All right, son!" and the sleepy apprentice went down to the main deck, where he curled up and went at once to sleep.

It was close to dawn when Thompson woke, and found O'Brien fast asleep. He left him there, and went to the wheel; to find Michael there, the ship in his sole charge. They talked of plans for the coming day, until with sunrise a scent of coffee pervaded the ship; Alphonse awake and busy in the galley.

When Alphonse fetched coffee to the poop for Thompson, O'Brien awoke, to stare perplexed at the dismasted ship before him. Polly said—

"We've got a hard day ahead, Pat. How do you feel now?"

While Michael grinned at O'Brien's flushed face, the oldest apprentice said—

"Tell the kid to take the wheel as soon as he's done eating."

Another day began, with the youngest at the helm again, and the breeze but an air to lift cobwebs.

"Do you think she'll ever make Falmouth?" asked O'Brien of Polly as, in midforenoon, they worked together at the mizzen mast's stump.

"Three thousand miles or so down to the Horn, son. Ask me by and by."

For two full weeks they toiled, and slept at night under the bright stars; and yet were but three hundred miles from where the *Marchaway* had been dismasted. Then, in a strong breeze from the west, she lifted to white-capped swells, and sailed with a ripple all about her.

Making crazy sails to fit misshapen spars they'd cut from the jigger topmast and the spanker boom and gaff, Michael, Olaf, and Tibbits plied their sail needles until the bark had all sail set that they could hope to give her—one lower topsail to each mast, above the lower yard, and upon fore and mizzen one more sail; a sort of jury upper topsail.

In cooler weather a dull content came to them. There were no towering topgallantsails, royals and skysails to climb to on dark

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nights now. Food, if poor, was plenty; though monotonous. Alphonse cooked as well as any sea cook.

All but the oldest hand, the boys lived in their half deck, on which they'd set up a good door again. The galley had a new door also; but the forecastle was abandoned; the three men dwelling in the locker room beneath the forecastle head.

Talking of stormy days ahead, they talked of Francis Drake, and of Magellan; wondering what it must have been like in an earlier day, sailing uncharted seas in very little ships, and no port looked forward to; only uncertainty.

Five weeks from her dismasting, Polly Thompson said, one windy morning—

"We ought to see Pitcairn before noon."

They kept a sharp lookout for the land all that morning. Noon came and went and afternoon drew on; Thompson searching the south for the expected island.

It was just past sunset when Olaf cried from the fore top—

"Land on the starboard bow!"

He took the wheel at eight o'clock.

Thompson, coming to his side, said—"Keep her up there, man. Don't let her fall off like that!"

Three times he came to tell Olaf to "keep her up," and at the third time said: "Any one would think you want to pile her up. You're getting too close in."

In the dark time after midnight, they saw a flame burst forth upon the island summit, and knew that they were seen. A shifty wind murmured in the gear; while lights of phosphorus brightened the sea about them.

Michael said—

"She's going to pick up them big westerly winds."

Olaf retorted—

"She can have dem!"

"Maybe girls comes off in the boats," said Alphonse, and when one of his comrades cried, "Flat feet, old son!"—all hands laughed.

They brought the bark to a halt, to wait the natives; who came off with two whaleboats, fruit-laden, and finding a distressed ship refused to barter. Boys and men sank their teeth in yellow bananas and green cocoanuts.

"Where's Olaf, sir?" Michael asked Polly, and at some meaning in the sailor's voice the other asked, "Why, Michael?"

"You best look in them fellow's boats, sir," said the sailor.

When he had searched the two boats in vain, the eldest apprentice called Tayne and Burford, and bade them search the ship.

Little Byson, hearing his comrades talk of the big sailor fallen overboard and lost, paled under his sea tan. Gloom settled on the *Marchaway*.

After a hopeless hour Thompson said to the islanders—

"We'll have to leave you boys."

The natives called long good-bys back from the dark astern when the *Marchaway* sailed on.

Polly was glum, saying to himself—

"The heaviest man we had. He was worth three. We'll miss him at the braces."

No one joked, while night and day for many nights and days the west wind blew; the sky growing ever heavier with low, banked cloud masses. The bark wallowed southward, a fine wind abaft her beam, and, because she made six knots an hour, where with her old, full canvas set she would have reeled fifteen away and left a foaming smother far astern, her company was glad.

Two weeks from Pitcairn it blew hard from sou'west, and, for the first time since her dismasting, the sea boarded her. They stretched lifelines along her and boused them tight down to deck bolts. Her jury rigging strained. Rain beat on her in gray sheets, and the wind whooped.

ONE day a ship, flying under topgallantsails, appeared astern, her sharp bow leaping to the rollers; sprays a high cloud along her windward side. Dark squalls raced from the westward, the air moaning.

They read the ship's name, *Genista*, and watched a signal flutter to her peak. Her crew, upon her forecastle head, gazed to the *Marchaway;* amongst them one huge sailor who stood, pointing with arm outstretched.

"He swam ashore, sir," Michael exclaimed to Polly Thompson, who replied, "Yes, bad luck to him! That's why he kept letting her fall off while we were nearing Pitcairn."

"What's her signal, sir?" asked Michael, and when the other answered, "They want to know if we'll abandon ship," spat into the lee sea.

Thompson turned to Tayne, saying—

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"Hoist the ensign to the masthead, Tayne!"

Boys and men of the dismasted ship stood all together, beneath the flying flag, while, gloom enveloping the two ships, the ring of a cheer came from *Genista*.

Rain, on the first breath of a squall, hid the ships from each other.

"How will we ever get that mainsail off her, Michael?" asked the eldest apprentice of the sailor at his side; and as dark fell on the lonely ship all hands followed the two aloft to the main yard; *Marchaway* springing like a lashed horse beneath them.

Too few to clue the sail up and furl it, they cut the earrings and the midship buntline, and slashed their knives hastily through all the straining robands; so that the great sail threshed down, wind and water bellied, to the deck below. They secured it to the railing stanchions, then hastened aloft upon the fore to stow the jury upper topsail. While they were there, invisible in the night, the topsail on the mizzen blew away; the report of its rending reaching them like the sharp crack of a cannon.

While the two men relieved each other at the helm, helped by the apprentices in turn, she flew into the night.

After eight bells at midnight the night lightened, and the moon shone through occasional windy rifts in the banked clouds. Michael at the wheel reported a ship's light ahead.

*Marchaway* stole up upon the other ship, whose canvas was presently illumined by the stormy moon, and all hands gathered to see *Genista* passed by *Marchaway*.

They drove for a time close to each other, low, half-guessed shapes swept by the rolling waters, and lurching fearsomely; their canvas now pallid in thin silvery light, now dim and shadowy in the rain squalls.

The bellowing west engulfed *Genista*, and she was lost to them.

At break of day the wind blew harder, and the bark wrenched her strong helmsmen's arms; ploughing the mountainous gray backs.

Alphonse made a great kind of cracker hash, breaking up hard tack and frying it with pork scraps, and all ate heartily at breakfast time.

When Alphonse, waiting on them, said—

"She ees roll me to my 'ome in Brussels"

the elder lads laughed at him; and, filling up their pipes, filled one for little Byson also, bidding him, "Smoke up, son! Come, get warm! You'll be a sailor soon."

The youngster, smoking black tobacco, went paler yet, till the sea cook said, " 'Ee's going to be *malade!*"

They told the kid to get out to the deck, if he must waste good cracker hash on fishes; so he went out, and, clinging to a lifeline, was deathly sick. Then, when, because it was his turn at the lee wheel, he started aft, Smith and Burford seized him and bore him to his bunk, Smith, saying, "All right, kid. Take it easy—" took the lee helm for him.

All that day the bark drove on her easting; the sky above like the humped backs of uncountable black galloping sheep, and the wind a hoot. Toward dog-watch time the wind eased, and the gray-backs lowered their heads; so that the sailors who had been her weather helmsmen rested, leaving her to her apprentices.

At ten o'clock Burford woke Polly, asleep on the chart-room settee, after thirty-six hours' continual watchfulness.

"*Genista* coming up under full sail," he said.

They watched *Genista* stealing up, till she lay close upon the starboard beam. A great calm settled on the sea, the bark's sails limp while the tall-sailed *Genista* yet stole on under her clouds of canvas.

Soundless hours passed.

When Michael came up to the poop at midnight, Polly said—

"If we had Olaf, Mike, we'd get that mainsail up aloft again." Michael swore at mention of the huge sailor's name.

While both peered into a light drizzle, watching *Genista*, a voice from the sea startled them.

"Sea lions, sir," said Michael.

The voice came again, from nearer.

"Drow me ropes!"

Unbelievingly, they hurled a light line out, over the water, Polly saying—

"Good lord! It's Olaf!"

A glint of moonlight on his massive features, Olaf appeared, and, as he clambered over the railing said— "Middouts me you cannint set dot mainsails."

He stood before them, naked, shivering, shamefaced.

"Wot did ye leave her for?" growled Michael; but Polly said, "Fix him some coffee, Mike."

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"Let him fix his own coffee!" said the sailor and walked forward with the dripping Olaf silent at his heels.

While the older apprentices said, "Olaf's some man!" little Byson watched the huge man unbelievingly, hauling with the strength of three men on the braces.

A wind from the east came, dead in her teeth, so that, with albatross and cape pigeons encircling her, she plunged hopelessly toward the south pole.

On his way to the wheel one evening Olaf asked Polly Thompson—

"You puts into dem Falklands, maybe, Captain?" and, when Thompson answered, "We're bound for Falmouth," said, "Den I goes mid you, sir."

With Olaf steering, a west-bound ship flew by and Thompson bade O'Brien hoist a signal.

"Vot der captain tell dot faller?" Olaf asked.

"We signaled, 'report me all well,' " replied O'Brien, and the helmsmen grunted—

"Dey iss poys says dings like dot only."

After many cold days of sailing he asked, "Vee is somewheres near dem Falklands yet, Mister?" and when Thompson said—"What of it?" retorted hastily, "Vell, a' right, captain!"

While Thompson and O'Brien laughed on the poop together he walked forward muttering—

"Dem —— poys!"

ONE gloomy evening when the wind blew strong from sou'west, and the bark was straining on her northward course, Smith came down from the mainyard to hurry to the poop.

"There's a steamer astern," he reported.

Thompson bade all hands hurry to the braces. They trimmed her yards, and headed her away, into the eastward, far off her course to Falmouth.

"We're not in steam tracks. She's out to look for us—maybe the owners sent her," said the eldest hand, and added, "to thunder with the owners. She'll have a hard time finding us."

They lit no sidelights that night, and kept her off her course till morning.

Morning brought a high, hazy sky, with little shreds of cloud wisp scurrying; the horizon in the westward smoking ominously.

Thompson called all hands.

"Look alive!" he shouted, "it's going to pipe like ——!"

They got the jury sails all off her; then because time was short, air and sea sobbing, cut the mainsail loose again. The foresail ripped to long streamers as they hastened down. They furled sail till all she had left was her main lower topsail and fore staysail; then struggled on the sea-swept deck, trying in vain to lash the mainsail to the stanchions. When it was swept half overboard, they cut it loose, and let it go to the sea; the wind now became a wall against which no one could remain erect. It blew like Barney's bull all day, and wilder when night came.

Fearing lest the already weakened midship house be carried bodily away Polly Thompson ordered all hands to the poop. When Tayne and Burford, Smith, O'Brien and Alphonse were there, and the three sailors, he shouted, "Where's the kid?"

Olaf left the poop and searching in the midship house, the galley, and the forecastle, searched for Byson in vain and returned alone to the chart-room. Looking in at the door, within which the apprentices sat huddled on the deck, with Thompson on the settee and Tibbits beside him, he waved and arm and shouted—

They caught fragmentary words—

"Nedder—nedder—vortamm poy—Falmouth—" and crouched the closer together for warmth.

Powerless to help *Marchaway* or themselves, they abided the outcome of the hurricane dumbly, and waited with enforced stoicism her foundering or survival.

At daybreak the fore staysail blew bodily from its bolt ropes and disappeared, high in the sea smoke, like the crumpled wing of a dissected bird; and a moment afterward the main lower topsail vanished utterly; as though it had been but one of those small white fungi that, destroyed in a puff of dust by a baby's heel, are known to children as "devil's puff balls."

Led by the eldest apprentice, the three sailors descended to the main deck, their forms becoming immediately invisible to the apprentices who watched from the lee doorway of the chart-room. Long after the small company of boys had supposed themselves to be the sole survivors of the *Marchaway's* crew, the bare, bowed head of Polly Thompson appeared in the mizzen shrouds.

The four who now ascended a little way



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from the railing top bore in their arms a slender, black roll, which with carefully preconcerted plan they proceeded to open and to stretch across the shrouds, and the ship, that had meanwhile fallen off to wallow helplessly in the troughs of the sea, came up with her bow to the wind again; steadied by the tarpaulin.

At the moment that her saviors returned to the poop Alphonse appeared from the cabin below, and the crew of the *Marchaway* ate hard tack for breakfast.

But for the contempt on Olaf's salt-crusted visage the sole expression on any face was one of complete weariness, combined with that vapid nonchalance that is borne of utter impotency.

Huddled one on another they fell asleep, sailors and boys together; Thompson alone erect, braced in the doorway.

They slept on, while the wind moderated and another night drew in; the oldest hand sleeping also.

At midnight a voice said—

"The blow's over," and some one asked—

"Is she afloat?"

While Michael rising to his feet chuckled, Thompson lit the lamp, saying—

"We'll have to get some sail on her."

Alphonse said:

"Vee eats, isn't it? I make zee coffee!"

As they sat and stood within the galley, and beside the lee door, devouring cracker hash and thankfully swallowing hot coffee, their eyes brightened.

Tayne said—

"It'll be warm in the tropics."

While the others yet ate and drank Olaf cried from the foremast—

"Sheet home top-sail!"

"If any other ship was in that blow we'll be posted missing," said Polly Thompson.

Next morning he called all hands to the quarterdeck. The boys stood together, Tibbits and Olaf a little way from them. Thompson looked down to them all from the break of the poop.

"If any of you want to leave her," he said, "we're not so far from the Falklands."

O'Brien looked up.

"We're out of smokes, sir," he said. "Is there any tobacco in the stores?"

Olaf said to Tibbits—

"Dey stays meet sheep, I staya."

Tibbits stepped forward.

"If there's compass, grub an' water, I'll take the boat, Mister."

Thompson called him to the chart-room, and showed him the chart, and the ship's position, and the course to the islands: between two and three hundred miles away.

They halted the bark, and lowered away the lifeboat for him; then watched him methodically set sail, as though he were about to cross a dock or river.

He turned to wave a hand, replying to Polly Thompson's "Good luck, Tibbits!"

"Nedder he cooms to Falklands," said Olaf.

"How long to Falmouth, Olaf?" asked an apprentice, and he answered—

"We nedder cooms to Falmouth."

"Fix us a big feed, Frenchy," said the eldest hand to Alphonse, and, with *Marchaway* upon her course again, called O'Brien aft to look in the storeroom for tobacco.

THE Horn astern, the Falklands passed, monotony crept in. Rain fell daily, with baffling breezes from all quarters. There was no sun or moon. There were no stars. The ship, her bulwarks spotted and streaked with rust, looked sodden, without life or hope. Her helmsmen, after looking astern to see the wake, looked forward gloomily. Birds had left her, and the sea was all her own. When night advanced and receded, the lookout men appeared like condemned beings the givers of whose sentences had either long ago died, or had forgotten them.

The lines of her scant rigging, the misshapen sails set on ill-fitting jury spars, made her grotesque; though, like a duchess who tramps wintry roadways peddling trinkets for her living, she retained an air of mysterious nobility. Her boys moved without spring in their feet or suppleness in their shoulders; while Olaf, passing Goliath-like amongst them, gave vent to appalling curses and wished speedy destruction upon them and the ship.

His wrath brought no smile to their faces, and entering the half deck they sat down to stare at one another dully.

When one night Michael went aft to the wheel and found Tayne, who should have been steering, prone on the deck and the ship with her sails aback, he hurried to awaken Polly Thompson, who looked up from his bed on the chart-room settee with an uninterested stare, and, saying "All right" made no move to go to the deck.

Michael returned to the forecastle; and

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there found Olaf, seated at the table with his chin in his hands.

"Vee got dot scurvys, Mike," said the big sailor, and Michael sat down on the door-sill and listened to the rain drip.

Presently they went to the half deck; then, while O'Brien took the wheel, the other boys, helped by the sailors, laboriously swung the yards around; Thompson arriving from the poop to assist them.

Through the following day the apprentices kept to the half deck, while Michael, his eyes alternately on his compass and the empty line of the horizon, steered her; relieved from time to time by Olaf, upon whose face the contemptuous scowl was now replaced by a look of wide-eyed fear.

A dark, wet night set in and all but Michael slept. Far in the night the wind died, and, the rain ceasing, great silence fell.

Michael went forward and lit the forgotten sidelights; then, having ascended to the forecastle head, started at sight of a blaze on the sea rim far to the westward, while, on *Marchaway's* starboard beam a white light winked.

He sat down and watched the white light draw slowly nearer, until his head drooped and he also slept.

Hours passed.

He wakened at a shout from the sea, "Ship ahoy!" and running aft fetched a flare, which he lighted at the break of the poop. Its dazzle illumined the jagged ruin of the mizzen mast, and the wrinkled little jury topsail. Thompson's pallid face appeared at the chart-room door.

A voice cried—

"What ship is that?"

The *cluck-cluck* of oars came from the water near by.

Five men swarmed over the railing below Michael and stood, blinded by the brilliance of the flare. Their shirts were bloody. From faces stained with blood they stared up to the wreck of the mizzen, the empty lifeboat chocks, and the ghostly faces of the apprentice and sailor.

As the flare died out their leader ascended to the poop.

"We was towin' a whale to the ship when we saw your lights," he said, and added, "Where are ye from and for?"

By the light of the chart-room lamp he looked earnestly at Thompson's face.

"Where's your skipper, boys?" he asked.

Michael nodded toward Polly Thompson.

"I'm taking her home, sir," said the eldest apprentice, and, a hand on either side of the door frame the whale ship's mate looked in on Thompson.

"I've seed *that* afore," he said.

Excited voices rose from the quarterdeck, and in a minute the crew of the whale boat gathered by their mate.

"Six of 'em, sir,—six boys an' two barnacles takin' the hooker to Falmouth!" cried one.

With a gesture toward Polly Thompson, the whaling mate said to a big man whose open shirt exposed a tattooed and bloody breast—

"Look there, Harpoons! He's her skipper."

To Thompson he said—

"How d'ye come wi' scurvy? Ain't ye a limejuice ship, boy?"

Thompson flushed, and looked to Michael, who looked back to him. Neither spoke.

The east heralded the approach of day. The fiery glow in the west paled.

The whaler's mate said:

"They've been cuttin' in whales all night, boys. I reckon they're done. I'll wait wi' ye an' signal the ship when light comes."

He spoke to his harpooner, who returned with the others to the boat.

"Ye'll get fresh meat for breakfast leastways," said the mate, and went to watch his boat; now pulling alongside a black bulk lifeless on the water close to *Marchaway*.

Polly Thompson said to Michael—

"I forgot all about the limejuice, Mike," and the sailor replied, "Me too, sir."

"Take Olaf below, Mike, and open up a barrel. There's sure to be one."

Olaf and Michael went down to the lazaret, seeking a barrel of limejuice; a keg of which had been finished the day previous to *Marchaway's* dismasting.

The whaler's mate pulled up a signal to his distant ship, for whose approach the bark waited with her main yards aback. The harpooner bore a great hunk of whale meat to the galley, and the apprentices gathering at the galley door sniffed eagerly as an odor of frying arose; one of the whale men taking Frenchy's place at the stove.

The whale ship bore down, and, a little astern of *Marchaway*, dropped a boat. Her skipper came aboard, and studying the scars of battle on the dismasted bark, listened to the story his mate told him.

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When the mate was done, he took Polly Thompson aside.

"We're just out from putting into Rio," he said, "an' bound for the Solander ground, off of New Zealand. We'll be home in three years maybe. D'ye want to come wi' us?"

"I've got to get her to Falmouth, sir," said Thompson.

"Ye've been posted missing long ago, boy," said the skipper. "Ye'll be no deader if ye come wi' me. I'm short-handed from a stove boat an' crippled crew yesterday, and I'll be glad to get ye."

"Can you let us have some vegetables, sir?" asked Thompson.

"Ye'll be lucky if ye ever see Falmouth, my lad," said the skipper.

"We've brought her from south of the line the other side, sir," said Thompson, and the other shrugged his shoulders.

"I've no spars nor canvas to spare ye," he said.

"We'll make out if you can let us have some vegetables, sir," replied the apprentice.

"Ye're a young fool, lad; but I'll say ye're a sailor!" said the skipper, and, calling his mate, bade him fetch supplies from the whaling ship; whence there now arose the greasy smell of the try works; her people cutting in the dead whale.

When the mate had come with a boatload of potatoes, and sacks of cabbages, and fruit from Rio, the skipper bade him bring off a good supply of whale meat.

The whalers braced up *Marchaway's* yards for the rising south wind; then, leaping back to their boat, shouted loud farewells, wishing the dismasted bark and all her little company good luck along the road to Falmouth.

They waved their hats, while *Marchaway*, her people waving back, stole off upon her homeward course once more.

"Hoist the ensign, O'Brien," said Polly Thompson, and the ensign of the merchant service fluttered to the mast head. It gave to the dismasted vessel an air of peculiar and unmistakable defiance, as though she were both conscious and proud of the banner that adorned her ruin, and were in her own being akin to those defiant spirits who had hoisted it.

White clouds passed above a blue sea, snowy crested. A warm sun shone. By midday the whaler was a white dot in the south, and soon thereafter *Marchaway* was alone upon her sea.

Color returned to the faces of the apprentices. Olaf was himself again, contemptuous and gigantic. When Thompson said to Michael—"It was my fault, Mike"—the sailor winked.

"Ye couldn't remember everything, sir," he said.

"She might have never got to Falmouth," said Thompson, and Olaf, overhearing, asked, "You teenks we coom to Falmouth, Mister?"

At Thompson's steady smile he laughed, "Ho, ho, ho!"

The trade winds held her, caressing her with breaths in which was balm. By night stars sparkled to her. Evening by evening a crescent moon grew larger.

Alphonse, wearing a white apron made of old sail cloth, and proud of his cookery, boiled potatoes and cabbages and hid beneath them thick steaks of whale. They washed their dinners down with limejuice, a drink despised till now, and toasted Alphonse, the ship, and one another, saying, "The Falmouth girls have got hold of the tow line!"

Seeing no more ships, they sailed contentedly; monotony forgotten for the time. The trade wind held, leading them well across the line. The sun blazed hotter and hotter. When calm fell, six degrees north of the line, the pitch between the deck planks sizzled. Their cabbages were gone, and all the fruit. Morning by morning they scrubbed her decks, after the custom of the sea. Evening by evening they threw water on them, to help keep the seams swelled.

When after three days of complete calm a black line rose from the rim of the ocean they stretched the rain sail in the mizzen rigging. The sky darkened, and at nightfall the rain came. They ran and shouted, skylarking in the warm squall, while *Marchaway* stole off in a good breeze. The fresh water tanks full, they took the rainsail down, and, the night inky about her, sat in the half deck.

Stars gleamed from an unclouded sky when the rain passed, and the wind, hauling round her stern, came from the easterly. Olaf, as they braced her yards round, said:

"Vee gets dem nord trades. Maybe vee cooms yet to Falmouth."

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NEXT day while some scoured rust spots from her railings others stirred paint, making preparations to get her ready for home—the port still more than three thousand miles away. With chisel and chipping hammer they bared her metal, making the steel bright where the rust had been.

Far to the northward the trade wind left them, and a cloudy sou'west wind blew them by and by into the weed patches of the Sargasso sea. Sailing always alone, accompanied only by the petrels that circled her stern, *Marchaway* came once more into the forties. There clouds gathered darkly, and, while the southwest wind left them, the sea tumbled. The north sky threatened, and they shortened sail, ready for western ocean weather.

Three days and three nights she labored, beaten by a gale, swept by great combers, with her helm lashed. While Olaf looked northeastward cries of petrels came, eerie and shrill in the wind lulls.

On the fourth dawning Olaf on lookout bellowed to Thompson upon the poop, and, his voice swept away, pointed.

Boys and men gathered on the forecastle head, and while the sea drenched over them and the gale roared, watched the barnacle grown keel of an upturned wooden vessel drift heavily past; then went to sit, moody and silent, in the half deck.

To Michael, Olaf said:

"Dere iss lots sheeps lost in vestern ocean, Mike. Maybe ve don'ts coom to Falmouth."

"Three hundred days out," muttered O'Brien, and added, "We're all dead long ago."

"Posted missing," said Burford, lighting his pipe.

They set sail again that afternoon, the wind in her teeth and the sky clearing; the horizon sharp and hard in the northeastward, whither they desired to go.

Thereafter for days that seemed interminable *Marchaway* beat hither and thither; or, her keel thick with sea growths, drifted sluggishly to lee, making no progress; the northeasters holding her in an unceasing grip.

The potatoes long ago gone they ate salt pork and swallowed pea soup, and bit on hard tack that, with weevils busy in it, crumbled in their teeth.

Without heart, they lowered old weather-worn sails away and dragged out new canvas from the locker to replace them. From the jury foretopsail yard they pointed whither, faint on the northern horizon, a low trail of smoke showed for a few minutes; then was lost to view.

Speaking no longer of home, no longer saying, "The Falmouth girls have got the tow line," they quarreled over trifles, and accused one another of lies; obeying Polly Thompson's orders with dull faces and lifeless movements. All alike conscious of, yet hating, discipline, each, desirous of loyalty jested at loyalty in others. Browned by the sun, face furrowed by long winds and salt, they voiced complaints to one another, and sneered at Olaf; their sneers unheard by the huge sailor in whose eyes they were but babes.

On the evening when at last the ship was all painted and all her sorry rigging tarred, they sat in the half-deck listless and uncaring, and, with no tobacco left on board, filled their pipes with dried tea leaves and smoked in darkness.

Her lamp oil all exhausted, she sailed with no lights that night.

Polly Thompson looked in—

"Keep a good lookout tonight," he said, "yell if you see anything, and we'll show a flare. It would be great to be reported."

When he went, one of them said—

"Go to ——!"

Half hearing, and part guessing the words, he hesitated a moment by an open port, and his face at the port said again—

"Keep a good lookout."

No one answered him, and he walked aft to his solitary place upon the poop to keep watch until midnight. When, relieved by one of the boys, he lay down in the chart-room he said— "Keep a good lookout—" and the other replied, "All right."

He slept, and the relief slept also; seated on the water keg before the jiggermast, worn out with hopelessness. The wind died down, and Michael, at the wheel, himself almost dispirited at last, nodded his head. The lookout man came down to the half-deck, seeking something to smoke, and, wakening another, stayed to chat.

A mist came over the sea, hiding the stars. Unseen and unseeing a liner passed, a thousand lights upon her, and Michael, hearing the beat of her screws when she was gone, turned to stare after her, and caught a glow that was lost at once in the

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fog. He called, and no one answered; till, disturbed by his continued calling, Thompson rose.

"What is it Michael?"

"A steamer passed close to, sir."

Thompson found the sleeping watcher, and shook him.

"Good ——!" he said, "we might have been reported but for you."

He sent the other forward and went to the forecastle to look for the lookout man, who sat nodding in the half deck. He struck a match in the half-deck and held it high, and all of them, awakening, looked at the match flame.

"Where's the wind?" asked one.

"Who's on lookout?" asked Polly and the lookout man said—

"I am."

"Then get out of here. A liner passed. She could have cut us down for all the good you are. We might have drowned like rats," said Thompson.

"We're all drowned long ago," said one, and the others laughed, tauntingly.

The lookout man went to his station, and Polly back to the poop.

Michael said—

"The wind's going to come out of sou'-west, sir, eh?"

"I hope so," Polly answered.

Morning opened coldly, with drizzle falling straight. Large drops of water fell from unbellying sails. Cries of unseen petrels came faint from the mists astern.

After breakfast Polly Thompson called the two sailors.

"Get up the holystones," he said, and while the men descended to the fore peak for the holystones called the boys to the quarterdeck. They stood there, glum, their forms bulky in oilskins, their faces half hidden under sou'westers, waiting.

Olaf and Michael brought the holystones —large flat sand stones for the scouring of the deck planks; work of all other ship work most monotonous.

Thompson looking down from the poop, said, "All right. Let's get her shone up." The boys glancing from one to another, knelt down listlessly, the sailors with them; whereat Thompson returned to the chart-room to pore over the western ocean chart.

For a time the apprentices shoved their holystones forth and back, listening to the sailors, who, scouring steadily, talked of other ships and other voyages.

Presently O'Brien rose to his knees.

"There's no sense in this," he said. "Let's go to the half-deck."

Michael at his side murmured—

"Son, you better obey orders!"

O'Brien said—

"You're only a —— A. B. I'm not taking orders from you."

He rose and walked forward to the half-deck, where, lighting his pipe, he sat on his sea chest.

ON THE quarterdeck Smith shoved his holystone to and fro. Tayne knelt erect and watched the drizzle falling. Alphonse, on all fours, was motionless, listening to the two sailors.

Thompson looked down—

"Where's O'Brien?" he asked.

No one answered him.

He said—

"Tayne get on with the job." Tayne bending down scoured half-heartedly.

Thompson walked to the half-deck.

"What's the idea?" he asked, and O'Brien looked up with his pipe in his lips.

"I said what's the idea?" repeated Thompson.

"You're not the skipper," said O'Brien.

"Get out of here!" said Thompson.

O'Brien taking his pipe from his lips puffed smoke down his nostrils, and shrugged his shoulders; then returned the pipe.

"You think you're pretty tough, don't you?" asked Thompson, and stepped over the doorsill.

He took O'Brien by the arm.

"Don't be a fool!" he said.

"Ah, go to ——!" retorted O'Brien, an angry light in his eyes, and wrenched his arm free.

"I'll fetch you out, Pat, if you don't come," said Thompson; and when the other made no move, took his arm again. O'Brien tried to wrench away, then, unable to free himself, struck at Thompson; who, taking no heed of the blow, dragged him toward the door.

O'Brien, his eyes blazing, struck out and hit Thompson on the mouth so that a trickle of blood came.

Thompson dragged him through the door, and they stood facing one another under the drip of the mainsail.

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"Well?" asked Thompson, his face very white.

"Go to ——!" said O'Brien.

Each threw his oilskin coat upon the fiferail.

A glimmer broke in the gray canopy above them, and for an instant sun shone on their bare heads. Thompson smiled. An uncertain light crossed O'Brien's face; then, muttering, "You're not skipper," he struck at Thompson.

They fought; Thompson tall, thoughtful, pendulous-limbed, and his adversary wiry, supple and furious.

The boys on the quarter deck knelt and stood to watch them, the sailors also ceasing their scouring. At the wheel Burford watched sails lift to a shifty breeze. But for the drip of water from sail and spar, and for the thud of blows there was no sound.

Thompson's mouth was bleeding. Ducking his head, O'Brien rushed at him, and, meeting the full drive of a swinging fist went down, to immediately leap up and fly in again.

"Pat's a fool," said Smith, as the onlookers walked toward them.

"So's Polly. To —— with holystoning," said Tayne.

"Dot Pat he gets keel if he don't watch," said Olaf as O'Brien went down again to lie still a moment.

Michael said to Polly—

"The wind's haulin', sir."

"All right," responded Polly, while her sails flapping, the ship came aback in a breeze from the west.

From his knees O'Brien saw the canvas all aback, and rose to his feet.

Olaf and Michael moved off to haul the yards around, the three boys still watching the combatants.

Some one said, "Fair wind to Falmouth," and Polly Thompson shouted "Trim those yards. Tayne, slack off for them!"

"You're a poor shrimp, Pat," he said. "I've a good mind to kill you," and as O'Brien, ducking, rushed in again, added, "She'd never get to Falmouth if they were all like you!"

His club-like fist met O'Brien's pointed chin, and, as O'Brien rose unsteadily, he asked—

"What about it, Pat?"

The others, passing forward to the fore braces, grinned at O'Brien.

"Fair wind to Falmouth, sons!" cried Michael.

Clear waters lapped about the *Marchaway*, the whitecaps rising.

"Did I ever say that I was skipper, Pat?" asked Polly Thompson.

Tears of rage, and hate, shame and affection, welled in O'Brien's eyes.

"Did I?" asked Polly again.

"No, sir," said O'Brien.

Thompson held out his hand, and as the other shamefacedly took it said— "Cut out that 'sir' stuff Pat."

Olaf said, "Dem —— poys!"

Thompson went to the poop, the boys and men to the holystones.

"Polly'd have killed you in about another minute," said Tayne to O'Brien kneeling beside him.

"He'd have killed you a —— sight quicker," replied O'Brien; whereat all laughed, O'Brien grinning.

Polly, looking down from the poop, asked. "What's the joke?" and Olaf said. "Dot Pats he say he vant beeger holystone, Captain," while O'Brien said, "You go clear to ——, squarehead!"

They scoured her till noon, when Polly said. "That'll do for today. We'll give her a touch up in the morning. Put your gear away."

They sat in the half-deck, and talked of everything but the morning's fight. Polly joined them there, telling Smith to take the poop and call him if any ships showed up.

*Marchaway* crawled homeward through thick weather all that afternoon. At sunset time the mists lifted, and rolled in fleecy banks; exposing tortuous sea lanes that, visible for a few moments, were hidden while others opened elsewhere.

At a cry from the forecastle head they all rushed out, to see, distinct over the low woof of the western ocean fog the uptowering topgallant sails and royals of a home-bound ship whose lower sails and hull were hidden from their view. Like men who see once more a beauty long forgotten they gazed at her speechless and, after she was lost to them, looked longingly into the mists that hid her. Just ere the fall of night a second ship appeared, a plunging hull that, the vision of but an instant, was outlined against fog banks that advanced to swallow it.

That night lookout men kept a bright lookout, and helmsmen steered with eager faces.

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When a red light showed astern, they ran to peer at an illusory shape that, dark in the darkness, sped swift away into the north eastward.

Next evening Michael called them to the deck, and pointed to a white gull wheeling close to her side.

"The Falmouth pilots—there's the first of them!" they said.

Olaf called down from lookout.

"You sees dem Falmouth pilots, Mike?"

Alone upon the forecastle head the nimble fleshy man flung his sea-booted feet, and, whirling, with hands on hips, danced for joy at sight of the white gulls of the channel.

Next day light airs drifted her slowly toward home, and at nightfall Polly said:

"We'll let the holystoning go tomorrow, and give her a good scrub down with sand. She'll be in soon, if the luck holds."

The midnight hours came starry, and the lookout men called, reporting many lights of many ships bound in.

One tall four-poster passed, a biscuit throw away, and a voice came over the water—

"What ship is that?"

When, after Thompson answered them, high cheers rang down to them their hearts leapt.

"You were posted missing long ago," the voice cried, and the six boys and two sailors of old *Marchaway* gave them back cheer for cheer.

In mid morning a tugboat darted out of the fog banks, and, swinging upon her heel, steamed close to the bark's counter.

"Stand by to take our tow line!" the tugboat skipper shouted, and Olaf, steering, seeing Polly Thompson ignore the salvage-eager tugboat skipper's cry, said—

"Goot poy—goot poy—by gar, ve *sails* to Falmouth."

All day and on into the night the tugboat hung close to her, and, leaving her for a time when day brought bright weather and a sunny sea steamed hither and thither amidst a dozen scattered in-bound ships, seeking for custom. The skippers laughed at him, bidding him go tow old *Marchaway* in.

By night all the stout ships were gone under the northeast sea rim, and the tugboat hung by the dismasted ship once more.

"It's goin' to blow. Ye better take my tow line," shouted the tugboat skipper, and had for answer neither word nor gesture.

Day saw the land ahead, a light air rippling gray waters under a gray sky. A shining three skysail ship passed *Marchaway*, and, shortening sail when she was just ahead, showed Polly the roadway into Falmouth harbor. Then the tug steamed off.

Flags flew at the Lizard station when *Marchaway* passed by, and men in brown-sailed fishing smacks rose up to wave and cheer.

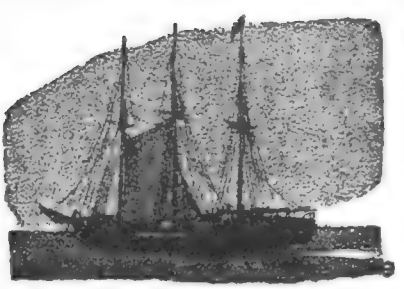
So *Marchaway* came home, and passing down an open waterway between long lines of ships was cheered till crews were hoarse.

Polly Thompson stood with his small crew on her main deck, by sheets and braces; Michael all ready to let go the anchor.

Her sides all stained with rusty red that glowed in the stormy lights of equinoctial sunset like blood stains on triumphant shield of home come warriors, she lay at rest amidst a great fleet of her stately sisters.

When all her ropes were coiled, and all her crew stood by her helm bare-headed, the eldest apprentice hoisted slowly to her broken masthead the ensign of the merchant service.

It gave to the dismasted bark an air of peculiar and unmistakable defiance, as though she were both conscious and proud of the banner that adorned her ruin, and were in her own being akin to the defiant spirit that had hoisted it.



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# The LEGACY MULE

by Alan LeMay

*Author of "Mustang Breed," "Telegraphy and the Bronc," etc.*

"OLD MAN" RUTHERFORD, boss and chief owner of the Triangle R, jerked his feet off the rail of his porch and placed his corn-cob pipe in their place. Then, his eyes pinched to slits between muscled cheekbones and grizzled brows, he squinted out into the white sunlight of the plain—and waited.

Two riders were coming in toward the log buildings of the Triangle R home ranch. One was tall and lanky, on a tall and rawboned buckskin horse. The other, a stocky man, jiggled uncomfortably upon a magnificent chestnut animal that jogged perpetually, refusing to walk. Even in the distance Rutherford could see that the stout man wore glazed "dude" boots. This gave the watcher his cue.

"Madge!" he called.

Madge Rutherford, a tanned girl of nineteen, came to the door and leaned mannishly against the jamb.

"Yes, pa?"

A smile flickered over her face as her clear gray eyes took in the approaching horsemen.

"That blitherin' lawyer from Spring River is about to happen to us again," Rutherford growled, running a huge hand over his craggy jaw.

"Havin' eyes," commented Madge, "I c'n see that!"

The Old Man grunted—

"Got any cold water?"

"I s'pose."

"Still got that lemon I brung from Spring River?"

"Yep."

"Better fix somethin' to drink."

"Shall I stick in a little coyote poison, pa?"

"If'n it sounds like trouble, it wouldn't be such a bad idee," Rutherford grinned.

They understood each other, those two.

As the horses neared the porch of the log cottage, the lanky rider swung a boot over the ears of his buckskin and slid off, somehow endowing the act with an air of infinite languor. The other dismounted more stiffly, and came forward with a foolish grin.

"Now don't get mad," the lawyer began at once. "I ain't got nothin' but the best o' news!"

He mopped the moisture from a moon-like face with a silk handkerchief of vivid green.

"Andy Morgan," said Old Man Rutherford, "if this is about that lease on Achin' Prairie—"

"No, no," said Morgan, "nothin' like that. Leave me persent Mister John Stewart!"

The lanky man thrust out a rawhide paw.

"John Stewart's my name," he drawled, ignoring the introduction.

He pronounced it "Jawn"—and was known as such forevermore. He was a sad-eyed young man, whose thinly dejected mustache and drooping lids offset the permanent lift of his sandy brows.



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"Jawn," Morgan went on with a twinkle in his eye, "has come into a legacy."

Jawn looked infinitely sad.

"You got a mule here name o' Crock-Eye," said Morgan, "which same belonged to 'Baltimore Bob' Stewart, deceased. It's been here some time, I take it."

"You're right I got the Crock-Eye mule," admitted Old Man Rutherford, "but you sure are wrong when you say you take it. No one takes that worthless, oversize jack-rabbit without they pay about eight year's feed bill! Never did I see such a hay-burner as that—"

"Sure," agreed Morgan. "That's all arranged in the will."

He pulled out a rather soiled folder of papers and began to read.

" 'Me, Robert Stewart, which same is famous as Baltimore Bob, being in my right mind, and ready and willing to fight the man as says I ain't—' "

"Come to the point," said Rutherford, and Morgan skipped three pages.

" 'To my practically worthless son, John, I do hereby will, and give away free, my mule Crock-Eye, which same is now boarding on Ben Rutherford, his Triangle R Ranch. And whatever the feed bill comes to by this time, it's got to be paid out of my money in the bank, so that John gets the mule all clear and title free. And that settles John, that is all he gets, leave him holler as he may.' "

"Holy Pete," commented Old Man Rutherford.

"Ain't it the truth?" moaned Jawn.

"So," Morgan concluded, "I'm perpared to pay off said feed bill, thus turnin' over Crock-Eye to the rightful legatee. How much would you say was right?"

"Anyways a hundred cartwheels," Rutherford managed to bring out. "*Anyways* that!"

"Right," said Morgan, extending a folded hundred-dollar bill with a card-dealing motion. "Jest my guess exact!"

For once Old Man Rutherford's eyes almost started from his head. Speechless, he pocketed the bill.

"Fer the last time," said Jawn Stewart, "what's the reason I can't have the cash an' leave the mule?"

"Tain't legal," snapped Morgan.

"I ain't goin' to stand fer—" Jawn began.

At this critical juncture Madge Rutherford appeared, bringing glasses in which swam a cool-looking greenish fluid. Jawn Stewart stopped abruptly, reddened and slowly closed his mouth. He stared at Madge with astounded eyes and hastily smoothed his slim mustache. Then, as an afterthought, he similarly groomed his permanently lifted brows.

"Bottom up to Crock-Eye," Rutherford toasted, raising his glass.

"Down the hatch," Morgan assented.

But Jawn Stewart gulped his drink in the silence of the stunned.

" 'WHISKERS!' " shouted Old Man Rutherford presently. "Whiskers Beck!"

A bow-legged old man with a bald head and a white brush of a beard stumbled out of the mess shack on the run, clapping on his Stetson as he came. Sighting the Old Man, he paused alertly and wiped his mustache with a faded crimson sleeve.

"Bring out the Crock-Eye!"

Whiskers Beck moved off, hobbling on his high-heeled boots. When he next appeared he was coaxing forward the leanest, floppiest, most discouraged-looking mule that Jawn Stewart had ever seen. Her dim, clouded old eyes and drooping lower lip bespoke advanced age.

"Come along!" urged Whiskers in a prodigious bellow. "Pore Crock-Eye. She don't hear so well no more."

"Do yuh know what?" said Jawn Stewart in a strained voice. "It's jest another o' paw's jokes!"

Tears glistened for a moment in his eyes—though for just what reason it would have been hard to say. Jawn furtively brushed them away.

"Yuh can leave her here, if yuh want," Rutherford volunteered.

Jawn Stewart's lean jaw clamped.

"Nossir!" he declared. "Not by a —— sight. This here's the only thing I ever got out o' paw, an' —— if I don't turn it to some account!"

"How?" Rutherford wanted to know.

"Well—*some* way!"

It developed that Crock-Eye had plans of her own. Jawn mounted with a view to departing, mule in hand. For perhaps a quarter of an hour Whiskers and the Old Man watched Jawn's endeavors to carry this program out. At the end of that time Whiskers conceived that Jawn was the wiser

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by experience, and therefore ripe for instruction.

"Mebbe you'd like I should make a suggestion," he offered at last.

"Brother," said Jawn, "if there's a way to move this ——, which same I doubt, it'll sure sound like sweet music to me!"

"She can't be led," Whiskers explained. "She can be rode, some."

When Jawn had changed saddle and bridle from the buckskin to the mule, Whiskers stepped forward. He clutched the reins close to the bit with one hand. Then he began to spin briskly with his back to the stirrup, forcing Crock-Eye to turn about the axis of his body. When Whiskers stopped, Crock-Eye was spraddling groggily.

"Now!" said Whiskers, puffing through his beard. "Mount up quick an' get her started in the right direction before she's sober! It's the only way."

Jawn Stewart vaulted into the saddle—if any man could make a clean vault into a saddle languidly, Jawn could do it—and prodded Crock-Eye with his spurs. With the buckskin following on the lead rope, mule and man jogged reeling away. Whiskers cheered and flourished his hat; but Jawn did not respond.

IT WAS Tuesday that Jawn Stewart rode his mule fifteen miles to the home ranch of the neighboring Sawbuck outfit, where he was then employed. On Wednesday Crock-Eye appeared at the Triangle R, and was admitted to the corral. On Thursday Jawn Stewart came and took her away. On Friday Crock-Eye again put in her appearance at the Triangle R. On Saturday Jawn was there in pursuit. On Monday—

"Boy," said Whiskers one evening, as Jawn strolled into the bunk-house at twilight, "you're gainin' on that mule! First two times you kept her one day. Next time two days. Now she ain't been back fer four whole days an' nights, an' I b'lieve that by fall round-up time yuh won't have to ride over here more'n once a week, on the outside!"

"Fella," said Jawn, stroking his sorrowful sandy mustache, "that mule has went too far with me! She's made a boob o' me fer the last time."

"Shuh," said Whiskers, "yuh ain't gone an' gave up?"

"Nossir," said Jawn, gazing at Whiskers from sad, sleepy eyes. "I aim to turn Crock-Eye to some account. If she won't jine my outfit, I'll jine hers. I jest seen Rutherford—and I'm now ridin' fer the Triangle R!"

With the geographic difference thus compromised, Jawn set about discovering a way to exploit his legacy mule.

THE J Z Ranch, forty-odd miles to northward, had built a commodious new camp at Gunsight Creek. Accordingly, "Whistling Tom" Sperry, riding for the J Z, presently stopped overnight at the Triangle R and passed the word that a big dance and general celebration would be held at the new camp, come Saturday week.

At this news the Old Man raved and swore, bitterly denouncing Joey Kelleher "the —— fool, cracking out with a shindig right in the middle o' the work season, the —— blitherin' half-witted ——" and so forth. But it was palpable that there was nothing he could do.

Five punchers happened to be present at the home ranch of the Triangle R on the evening that the news broke.

"And so," said Whistling Tom as they sat, all hands busy, at the long table in the mess shack, "o' course there'll be a big dance. I betcha it will be the biggest—"

Whiskers Beck, without permitting his knife to miss a stroke, turned wise old eyes in a casual survey of his mates. He was in time to see that blank expression known as the poker face mask the countenances of three cowpunchers—"Dixie" Kane, the bronc peeler; "Squirty" Wallace, top hand; and "Whack-Ear" Banks, giant straw boss of the Triangle R.

"When it comes to shakin' a hoof, I guess there ain't no one can hardly come up to old Dix—"

Dixie Kane paused as his eye struck Squirty Wallace, and a worried expression came into his youthful eyes. He quietly laid down his knife.

"Gents, I—I feel sick. I—I feel like I sure swallered a scorpion, more'n a foot long. Oh, my gosh! Oh, murder! Gimme air—"

He untangled his slim legs from the bench and staggered out. Whiskers Beck, from his commanding position at the head of the table, got a glimpse through the window of Dixie straightening out for the bunk-house on the dead run.

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At this Squirty Wallace ran a thoughtful hand through his rusty hair. His steady, calm black eyes traveled slowly over the little group that remained. Suddenly he thrust a knife load of hash into his mouth, flung down the knife, and burst into a fit of violent choking. As he entered the second racking spasm he struggled to his feet, and lurched out into the purpling dimness of the dusk.

Whack-Ear Banks turned his big, solemn face to Whiskers.

"You got a better line out the window than I have. They both hoed gravel for the bunk-house, didn't they?"

Whiskers craned his neck and caught a glimpse of Squirty streaking after Dixie Kane.

"Mister," he answered, "you musta read them boys' minds."

"That bein' the case—" Whack-Ear rose deliberately— "I guess I better go see has that sorrel o' mine foundered hisself. Plumb forgot t'do that. Yessir."

He sauntered out, with the calm assurance of one who has the situation fully in hand.

A grin spread Whiskers' bushy beard fanwise as he noted that Whack-Ear actually turned toward the corral.

"Overconfidence," he muttered. "He don't know it yet, but that's what rooned him."

He suddenly reached out a wiry old paw and gripped Jawn Stewart's wrist. With the other hand he hastily untangled his white beard from his mustache, that he might speak freely and without impediment.

"Listen! You know where them boys has gone?"

"Where?" asked Jawn politely, stuffing his mouth with his knife.

"They aim to ask Madge Rutherford can they take her to this dance," said Whiskers, jerking Jawn's arm as if it were the lead rope of a sleepy horse. "Dixie's gone to get on his new boots. Squirty's after his purple shirt, an' mebbe the yalla hanky to go round his neck. Whack-Ear figures to stroll out through the corral an' come up the back way, beatin' 'em out by jest one step.

"An' here's your chance—gallop right straight across, an' bust int' the house 'thout knockin', an' holler—'Miz Ruth'ford, please leave me take yuh to the dance!' An' she will, 'cause you'll be the first! Now, move!"

As the full significance of this enterprising suggestion soaked into Jawn's consciousness, he became absolutely paralyzed. Sheer panic rendered him devoid of speech. To admire the Old Man's hard-riding daughter from a distance was one thing, but actually to walk in and speak to her—

"Get goin'! Don't sit there like a —— idjut!"

Whiskers started up with astonishing agility, seized the back of Jawn's belt with both hands, and hauled him clear of the bench by main force. Jawn found himself thrust out the door, knife still in hand.

"Now, run!"

Jawn gulped—his mouth was full—and took two or three halting steps. His knees were wobbling under him. Whiskers fairly danced with wrathful suspense. In another moment his candidate would be definitely defeated. The aged puncher snatched at his holster and by some odd chance the old .45 was there. *Blam!* roared the ancient gun, and the dirt spurted at Jawn's heels. He ran.

AT ABOUT the time Jawn Stewart attained his rather synthetic success with Madge, the Triangle R's first telephone was installed. Four miles of wire had been laid to the nearest through-line. The meager service available was not worth it, but Old Man Rutherford's bull-headedness had pushed the project through.

This notable achievement suggested to Jawn a solution of his big problem—that of how to make use of his legacy mule. He was now seen to regard Crock-Eye with a new respect, such as a man accords a valuable and handsome thing.

Work was slack, and Jawn secured a day off without difficulty. Leading a saddle animal, he rode off on Crock-Eye in the direction of the Circle Box Cross, a small but expensively equipped outfit half a day's ride to southward. By night he was back, muleless, but leading a wiry gray mustang.

"How much didja pay to boot?" Whiskers asked.

"Nothin'," was the remarkable reply. "Yuh see, some o' the Circle Box boys wants to go get some broom tails. I showed him where a mule was worth more to 'em than work than any six horses they [illegible]. Jest throw the mustang, yoke him to the mule with a swivel, an' leave the mule to

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bring him home. Works every time. So they swapped the gray, he bein' a renegade, an' a striker, an' not broke yet, an'—"

"Looks like they trimmed yuh, at that," Whiskers adjudged.

Jawn stroked his lank mustache, and gazed at Whiskers with sad eyes.

"Any horse is worth it, that yuh get free," was his comment.

Late the next afternoon Jawn applied timidly at the Old Man's cottage with the request that he be permitted to use the phone. He rang up the Circle Box Cross.

"Tim there?" Madge Rutherford heard him ask. "Yeah, Tim Peters . . . Say, Tim, yuh know that mule I swapped for the gray . . . Yeah, I know it . . . About four this afternoon . . . Yeah, hardly anythin' can get so cussed homesick as a mule . . . Why, generally about four years straightens 'em out, Tim . . . Well, yuh better ride over here an' get her . . . Say, I never thought o' that. She would bring them mustangs here, now wouldn't she? . . . Oh, no, I couldn't swap back, Tim . . . Cowboy, if yuh can't use langwidge fit to eat . . . Operator! Yuh cut us off! Oh, he rung off, did he? Good!"

Jawn turned away from the telephone, beaming.

"My mule," he said to Madge Rutherford.

"Seems that Crock-Eye went an' deserted them boys, before they had a chance to try her out on the mustangs at all. They guess she won't be much use to them, she havin' such set idees as to where is home."

"So you traded back?" asked Madge.

"Well—not exactly. Tim, he says fer me to take that mule an'— Well, he says he'll be much obliged if I'll keep her; he don't want her any more. O' course, them weren't his exact words, but he made it real plain that he don't want her, an'—"

"I don't know as yuh played him fair," said Madge, fixing him with her level gray eyes.

Jawn squirmed.

"Aw, now—wait'll yuh see the mean actin' corkscrew they worked off on *me*," he defended himself. "They was all sniggerin' when I rode off!"

"I guess maybe that's right," Madge admitted. She casually bowled him over with a smile, and he stumbled out.

Doughfoot Wilson rode in that evening, and Jawn was not long in cashing in on his trade. Conveniently for Jawn, Doughfoot was suffering one of his periodic hankerings to train a top horse of his own.

"What I want is a regular side-winder," he declared. "I bet I can take a mean one an' do anything with him. I'd like to have a mean one here right now. I'd— Whatcha laughin' at? Look what I did with Rattlesnake. He's good, ain't he?"

"Fer what?" Whiskers asked.

"I got just the cayuse fer yuh," said Jawn, gathering Doughfoot by the arm and starting for the main corral. "Yessir—he's fer sale!"

Before Jawn was through with him, Doughfoot had pledged the very good price of ten dollars out of his next pay, and the wiry gray was his.

"I guess I got ahead o' paw fer *once!*" Jawn told Whiskers. "Ten dollars in one day—an' the mule's still mine. Three hunderd sixty-five days in the year—that's three thousand, six hunderd fifty dollars. Call it four thousand. I'll take the four thousand an' buy me mixed stock. They'll pretty nigh double every year. In two years that'll be eight thousand, in three years it'll be sixteen thousand, in four years—"

"I figgered that all out before," Whiskers interrupted. "In twenty years it comes to more'n a hunderd million dollars, or about a million times as much money as there is in the state o' Wyoming."

"Whiskers," said Jawn, "I c'n see where paw's joke mule has made me a rich man. That bein' the case, I gotta have some new clo'es to dance in—that's sartain. Tomorrow, when yuh ride to Spring River, I want yuh to get me the swellest rig money will buy. Gimme that tight-fittin' light suit we seen in the store. An' one o' them yalla vests, an' shoes to match. An' a derby hat with one o' them extry bands. An'—"

"Son," said Whiskers, his old blue eyes twinkling, "I'm backin' yuh. You jest leave the details o' this sartorical effect to me!"

By the next day the Triangle R telephone was out of commission; but Jawn now considered his plan satisfactorily tested and felt safe in going ahead.

The Gunsight dance was scheduled for Saturday night. On Friday morning Jawn set out for the Plumb Bob C, four hours away by horse, or eight by mule. His plan was to put up at the Plumb Bob for the night. By saddling at dawn he could still

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get back in time to change into his new clothes from Spring River and ride with Madge to Gunsight Creek before dark.

This time Jawn took no horse with him.

"I figure to be real uppety," he explained. "I ain't goin' to swap my good first-class mule for nothin' that can't be rode!"

"What if yuh can't make sech a swap?" Whiskers worried. "Then the mule won't get yuh back in time—an' I'm responsible fer yuh, in a way."

"Well, I can always borry a horse, can't I?"

Jogging bumpily on his freshly dizzied mule, Jawn rode away.

Jawn's joke mule roused little enthusiasm among the men of the Plumb Bob C. The foreman, however, had a horse which he was willing to trade. In fact, he admitted frankly that he was only too glad to have the animal moved away—the farther the better. This desirable mount was a rangy, hammerheaded black who had made something of a reputation for himself as a killer. Two Plumb Bob C waddies were on the hospital list at the time, one trampled, the other with his shoulder badly torn by the killer's teeth.

"Mind yuh, I ain't sayin' he ain't broke to the saddle," said the Plumb Bob foreman, rubbing a coppery lantern jaw with his thumb. "He is—if yuh can ride all right. But I says be careful how yuh get on an' off. Snub his head short an' don't turn loose until you're sure you're top side.

"But the main thing is never get down off him. Always get *up* off him. Which yuh do by ridin' close to a fence, an' climbin' from there up. 'Cause if yuh dismount to the ground he'll turn on yuh quicker than grease snakes!"

Jawn was satisfied.

"Reckon he'll do," he agreed. "I now changes his name to 'Dynamite,' to remind me to act accordin'."

The foreman was up in time to see Jawn off in the opalescent gray light of the dawn. A slight accident occurred as the Plumb Bob man showed Jawn how to bridle his new horse. A vicious wrench of Dynamite's head jerked the bridle from the foreman's hand. When they had dragged it from beneath a grinding hoof they discovered that the bit was too badly bent for use. Jawn, however, declined the loan of another bit, and straightened the bent one by hammering it between two rocks.

"Look out for his reach," the foreman shouted after Jawn as he rode off. "That neck is about four feet longer than it looks!"

The hammerheaded black was an excellent traveler. Before six o'clock in the morning his long strides had eaten a good quarter of the distance home, and he was only warming up. Dynamite was now displaying a hard mouth and a desire to make it a one horse race. Jawn was forced to haul continually upon the horse's mouth to hold him down to what Jawn considered a proper pace for the distance.

Tougher and tougher grew Dynamite's mouth as he warmed into a lather. Harder and harder Jawn dragged on the reins to make Dynamite see it his way.

And then the bit snapped.

The sudden relax of the reins made Jawn's hair stand on end. Free of the sawing bit, Dynamite did just the opposite of what might have been expected. He stopped short, and the reins whistled through Jawn's fingers as the horse threw down his head. The black had few brains and little intelligence, but he had the infallible cayuse instinct for picking the worst thing he could possibly do. A swift scrape of the animal's poll against a rigid foreleg, and the broken bridle was off.

Jawn's swift clutch at the reins and his double stab with the spurs came too late. The broken bridle trailed free in his hands. In the next moment he lost it altogether, as the cayuse went into a violent fit of bucking. Jawn all but lost the saddle. Far out on the plain, on a bridleless bucking horse, with an all-important engagement ahead of you and nothing else to ride in sight, is not the place to do exhibition riding. Jawn grabbed leather, fore and aft.

"Now, —— you, kettle!" Jawn was getting mad. "That's it—bust wide open! Give yourself ——!"

Dynamite changed ends three times and ran. Jawn added the encouragement of spurs. He could not guide the brute, even with his legs; Dynamite was too strong-headed for that. But any ordinary horse would return to the home ranch whence he had come. And Jawn could still borrow another bridle—or horse, if necessary—and get back to the Triangle R in time.

But—what the Sam Hill! Dynamite was evidently not a stereotyped horse. Jawn perceived that the tough black was not headed for the Plumb Bob C at all, but for

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some indefinite point in the distant hills. He hastily sought a remedy.

He reached for his rope; and, shaking out a little wild-cat noose, dropped it over Dynamite's head. He brought it tight just back of the jaws, and set about choking the cayuse into submission. Another interim of savage bucking was the immediate result; but presently, by a judicious manipulation of the rope, Jawn brought Dynamite to a stop.

Choking the horse to a standstill was one thing; getting him to travel in the way he should go was another. If Jawn was mad, Dynamite was furious. He stood with humped back, rolling glassy eyes, and refusing to budge. When harsh rips of the spurs got him started, he kettled again; then streaked out in the wrong direction. Jawn couldn't turn him. Once more Dynamite was choked to a full stop, after another spell of terrific bucking.

Time was passing. Jawn was anxious to be on his way. For the first quarter of an hour of this he hoped that Dynamite's defection was temporary, a whim of the moment. For the next fifteen minutes he maintained the illusion that a good stiff battle would speedily wear the horse into submission. During the remainder of the first hour Jawn began to worry a lot.

DYNAMITE had been trained with bit and quirt. Jawn had neither one. His tools were the rope, with which he could choke Dynamite to a stop, and the spurs. The latter were almost useless. In Dynamite's psychology, spurs meant "buck," just as oats meant "eat," and a man on the ground meant "strike and trample." In the dim smother of notions that passed for Dynamite's brain, these things were automatic.

A second hour passed, and Jawn's anxiety became almost frantic. He was not afraid of bucking horses, nor killers, nor charging steers. A day or so hungry and afoot on the plain were all in the week's work to him. Before now he had lain behind the carcase of his fallen horse, hoarding his cartridges while flying soft-nose bullets whispered "cousin" in his ear—and he had not been afraid. But this was different. A cold sweat broke out at the edge of Jawn's scalp.

He would have left the horse and walked, but he knew from the foreman's story that Dynamite would instantly strike him down. He presently conceived a plan to *fall* off while Dynamite was in full career, knowing that the horse would probably plunge on and leave him. But by this time Dynamite had ceased running, and confined his bucking to short stiff jolts, a few at a time. These alternated with long periods of savage sulks, almost, if not quite, equal to the achievements of Crock-Eye herself.

Once Jawn threw Dynamite. As the horse bucked, Jawn let down a loop of the rope, and as Dynamite stepped through, the rope pinned a fighting foreleg against the animal's head. Dynamite promptly somersaulted, Jawn flinging himself clear. His plan had been to hog-tie the horse and leave on foot. But Dynamite rolled like a shot rabbit, and the man was glad to make the saddle as the horse heaved to his feet.

As the third hour dragged by without improvement, Jawn was becoming desperate. Even now he should be unsaddling at the Triangle R. His dread increased to something approaching a panic. The girl that he timorously worshiped was probably already waiting with the greatest impatience, her horse saddled and ready to ride. And Jawn Stewart sat miles away on a horse that he could neither leave nor guide.

Pulling himself together, he began a slow, coaxing campaign, endeavoring to persuade Dynamite to the right course by gently insistent tugs of the rope. Nothing happened—until the tugs had by degrees became strong enough to be irritating, and then Dynamite replied with a few more hard jolts.

"Goshelmighty!" burst out Jawn, almost in tears, "did any one ever hear tell o' the like?"

Furiously he slashed Dynamite's ears with the rope and struck in the spurs. In the mad bucking that followed a new hazard appeared. As Dynamite changed ends, Jawn felt the saddle slip. Glad enough was Jawn to choke the lean black to a stop. He wrenched at the saddle, squaring it somewhat. Dynamite bucked. Jawn stopped him again, and tried to reach down for the latigo, too loose now that Dynamite had worked out his morning feed. Again Dynamite bucked, his single answer to Jawn's every move.

Haggard and discouraged, with his last cuss word used up, Jawn sat the saddle, awaiting Dynamite's pleasure. Dynamite, too, was all but beaten, had Jawn but

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known. But in that hour neither horse nor man was aware of how near he was to mastery over the other. A few more bucks would have brought the saddle under Dynamite's belly, and Jawn under his stamping hooves. Or a few more slashes of the spurs on bleeding flanks, another wrench or two of the rope on an aching throat, and Dynamite would have been bent to Jawn's will. Neither knew. Fearful, but bitterly stubborn, they waited, each with all his heart hating the other.

Jogging, shambling hooves sounded behind them. Jawn turned in his saddle with an oath of thanks that help had come—No, his hopes had flared too soon. A riderless animal was approaching, unaware of the man and horse. It was Crock-Eye, going home.

With head down, long ears and lower lip swinging, dim eyes almost closed—perhaps in sleep— Crock-Eye made her way by instinctive sense of direction alone. Slowly she came on, almost straight toward them. Eyes and ears were alike too old to warn her of what manner of friend or foe was ahead. If she scented man and horse she gave no sign. They were nothing to her. Crock-Eye was going home.

Hardly daring to breathe lest he set Dynamite off again, Jawn Stewart watched his mule come on. If only she should pass near enough—Jawn contemplated a mad dash for the mule, to gain Crock-Eye's back before Dynamite, given the upper hand at last, should do for him. There was the most serious danger involved. Almost, it seemed to Jawn, he had no chance at all. If he were a fraction of a second too slow, or if Crock-Eye should startle and bolt, it would in grim truth be the end. Yet for a moment it seemed to him the only possible way.

Then an inspiration came to him, and hastily he fumbled to free the tied end of his rope from the horn. His shaking fingers knotted a hondo, and he shook out a wide loop. Nearer, came Crock-Eye, passing close. Close as she passed, it seemed to Jawn that she was very far away. He dared not swing the rope about his head, lest Dynamite go wild. He waited until Crock-Eye was as near as she ever would get. Then, with a single motion of his arm, he made the throw.

The wide noose leaped out to the end of the rope and dropped. Crock-Eye waked, and leaped forward as the rope struck her neck back of the ears. Her bound took her fore quarters cleanly through the loop; Jawn snapped back the slack, and the rope tightened on Crock-Eye's barrel. Horse and mule were yoked.

Dynamite, roused once more by the new feel of the rope that circled his throat, made a mad rush, on a tangent to the course of the mule. There was a great shock as the rope sang taut, and horse and mule went down. Jawn catapulted a dozen feet from Dynamite's saddle. Crock-Eye was the first up, not having been dazed by such a cracking wrench as the horse had suffered. Jawn scrambled up, and was back to the horse in two strides. He was in the saddle as the lean black surged up.

Once more Dynamite turned his nose toward those distant hills and tried to run. But this time not only Crock-Eye's weight, but all Crock-Eye's stubbornness was dragging at his throat. Four great straining bounds carried him farther up and down than in the direction in which he was headed. Dynamite gave up.

Then, as Crock-Eye struggled to run, Dynamite remembered the one lesson he had ever fully learned at the hands of man—that the rope that leads is not to be denied. Crock-Eye set out in a bee-line, traveling at a humping rocking-horse gallop. Horse and man followed, towed at the end of the jerking rope.

SQUIRTY WALLACE'S horny hand slid nervously over his slicked-down russet hair, then dropped to fumble caressingly at the canary silk handkerchief about his neck. With the other hand he drew out his thick one-handed watch.

"It's five after twelve," he said with emphasis, turning slow black eyes upon Whiskers Beck. "An' forty-two miles to ride."

"That bein' the case," said Whiskers, with well-concealed perturbation, "let's go back an' eat some more."

This suggestion was ignored by both Squirty and the third cowboy, Dixie Kane. The three stood, with the nervous expectancy of waiting men, under a cottonwood tree well out in front of the ranch buildings of the Triangle R.

"It ain't as if," said Dixie Kane, "Madge would want to ride with them dude clo'es, anyway. Squirty, didja hear what Jawn told Whiskers to get? Tight pants, with

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big black-an'-white checks in. High collar, an' a boiled shirt with agate studs. An' a derby hat, with a extry green-an'-white band. All such truck. Well, 'sall right fer owners, an' mayors, an' such, but a ordinary cowboy in a rig like that just looks plumb ridic'lous."

"You're jealous," Whiskers grinned. "They all fall fer the gent's snappy attire!"

"Madge don't," affirmed Squirty, spitting. "Watch her give him the laugh!"

"Anyway," said Whiskers, "I didn't get jest exactly what he said I should. Jawn don't know it, but he now owns a ten-pound hat with silver conchas on, an' bran' new goathide chaps, an' a hand-tooled leather vest—top class—an' fancy stitched boots, an' a lavender silk skirt with a three-color hanky. Also sundries an' extras, includin'—"

Whiskers could see Dixie and Squirty growing cold-eyed with envy.

"Anyway," said Squirty, "he won't have time to get into 'em! He's so late now he'll have to ride in his workin' clo'es—overalls an' all!"

"Don't misinform yerself," retorted Whiskers. "I got Jawn's stuff all laid out on his bunk, ready for fast action. His vest is already bein' worn by his shirt, which shirt is already tucked in his pants, an' the pants tucked in the boots, an' the chaps outside of 'em both. Hanky's tied in a fancy knot, ready to sling over his head. One jump, an' Jawn's into the rig, with nothin' to do but buckle his new four-inch belt, an' ride!"

"Pervidin' he gets here," said Squirty.

"I borried the Old Man's own top horse, Alabam," Whiskers went on. "Alabam's dressed up in my own seventy-five pound, silver-plastered saddle an' bridle. An' when it comes to horse's underwear, you gotta admit there's very few saddles like mine. When Jawn skedaddles into his new rig an' crawls on Alabam, you roughnecks will look like two sheep-herders what got run over by a stampede, after a hard night in the mud."

"He ain't here yet," said Squirty. "Me an' Dixie an' Whack-Ear is stickin' together on this. Whack-Ear's up to the house now, reasonin' with Madge. An' I'll raise yuh that within a half hour you'll see Madge bein' escorted out o' here by a proper *parada*, consistin' o' three o' Wyoming's toppin'est hands!"

"*Parada* is right," Whiskers snickered. "She sure will feel like she got lost in the main herd!"

The three peered out into the dazzling light of the plain.

"Not a speck o' dust risin' on the Valley Trail," commented Dixie. "That means he can't possibly get here in a hour—even s'posin' he was just comin' in sight. You can see twenty miles down that trail!"

"Mebbe he come some other way," said Whiskers, shifting uneasily.

Squirty laughed.

"Over the Hennepin spur, maybe?" he suggested. "That's the other way!" He jerked a thumb at a great jagged butte, long and rugged, rising almost sheer from the plain five hundred yards away. "Real lovely short cut, that is! All he'd hafta do is get through the Cockerel Cuts, an' over Buffalo Butte, an' the Dogie Ridge, an' not slide off the shoulder of old Humpback, an'—"

"Guess that's so," confessed Whiskers combing his beard. He permitted his worry to show in his crinkled old eyes. "Yep—looks good fer you boys' Ladies' Aid Club, that's a fact."

He strained his vision for a glimpse of the dust that would show Jawn to be on his way. But only heat waves stirred on the long scar of the Valley Trail.

Whack-Ear Banks now strode up from the direction of Rutherford's cottage, his big face illumined by a broad grin. Dixie and Squirty turned to him eagerly.

"It's ten after twelve," said Whack-Ear in his deep drawl. "Madge's all ready, an' honin' to ride. Come twelve-fifteen, an' no sign o' Jawn, she aims to go with *us!*"

Squirty punched Whiskers in the ribs. "Now where's yer mule-ridin' bucko? Where is he, huh? In the soup, cowboy—that's where! Him an' his —— dude idees—"

"Wait now," Whiskers objected. "We got five minutes, yet."

"Four," Squirty amended, drawing out his watch.

With wide-braced legs, like a man judging a horse race, Squirty faced the Valley Trail, timepiece on display.

Shoulder to shoulder the others clustered around him, glancing tensely from the face of the watch to the horizon where disappeared the trail, and back again.

"Three minutes an' a half," Squirty intoned. Then presently, "Three minutes."

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Whiskers clawed his beard.

"Two minutes an' a half," said Squirty, when it seemed that about an hour had passed.

Dixie rolled a shaky cigaret, and Whack-Ear followed suit.

"Two minutes," said Squirty.

How the time dragged!

"One minute an' one half!"

Still nothing but heat waves moving on the dusty Valley Trail.

"I think I see somethin'!" declared Whiskers.

But the others would have none of him.

"Only one minute left. Boys, get ready to run for the house. Forty-five seconds. Half minute! Fifteen seconds—"

"Wait!" begged Whiskers. "Ain't that a haze o' dust, down by Walker's shanty?"

"Horse collar," said Whack-Ear. "There ain't nothin'!"

"Five seconds!" said Squirty.

"Great hollerin' grief!" Whack-Ear yelled, whirling to face the Hennepin spur. "In ——'s name what's that?"

All eyes followed Whack-Ear's pointing arm.

Down the steep face of Hennepin spur came two animals, one bearing a man. The riderless one had evidently pulled the other over the brink by means of the rope that made them one. They could recognize this animal as a mule, sliding down the side of Hennepin on braced feet.

As they watched, the horse and rider plunged past the mule, headed for the bottom as if they never would stop. The rope snapped taut. By some miracle the horse kept his feet, and horse, man, and mule hurtled down the steep at a break-neck pace.

"It's him!" cried Whiskers. "It's Jawn!"

The others stared open-mouthed.

As they reached level ground the horse would have pulled up, but the mule, now all but home, galloped on, dragging horse and rider in her wake.

"He took the short cut!" shouted Whiskers. "He's in time!"

Then, as the weird party approached, Whiskers, too, became silent and open-mouthed, astounded at the sight that affronted their eyes.

Ears flopping, mouth open, but advancing in long bounds withal, came the Crock-Eye mule. Behind her, led by Jawn's rope, came a lean, long-legged horse, covered with lather and with eyes fairly starting from his head. In the wobbling saddle sat Jawn. His hat was gone, his face a white mask of dust, grotesquely streaked with sweat. He clutched the horn, making continual frantic, jerking efforts to keep the saddle on top. Jawn's eyebrows had retreated practically into his hair, and his mouth was drawn into the expression of a man who is whistling.

Four punchers stared as this arrangement flashed past toward the corral. Then, suddenly, stunned dismay gave way to a great overpowering mirth. Three punchers looked at each other, and began to roar. Their usually solemn faces became contorted; they shrieked, they whooped, they yelled. They pounded each other with fists, and flung arms about each other's shoulders for support. Doubled up and wracked with laughter, they staggered after Jawn toward the corral.

They were in time to see Jawn make a leap and a clutch at the top rail of the corral as his mount swept past. Jawn made it, and, with his horse out from under him, climbed stiffly to the ground. At this the hyena-like bellows of laughter broke forth anew. Only Whiskers remained solemn, appearing dazed, and a little hurt.

For a moment or two Jawn stood and looked at the hysterical punchers. Then he stepped forward, and, without asking, borrowed Whiskers' gun. *Blam!* said the old forty-five, and a hole of remarkable size appeared in the ground at their feet. At this the cackling punchers were able to pause long enough to find out what went on.

"Fellas," said Jawn sadly, "laugh all yuh want. Haze out all the funny cracks yuh can think up. That's right! Make as big a fool of me as yuh can—'sall right with me. *But*—" Jawn's mournful eyes narrowed with menace as he went on—"*but*, the waddie that starts to make the least little joke about Crock-Eye—he's gotta beat me to the draw! She may be moth-eaten, an' her feet don't track so good, an' the coyotes mayn't want to eat her when she dies. But boys—" and Jawn's voice vibrated with sincerity—"that mule sure means home sweet home to me!"

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# LA CAPITANE *

by Claude Farrere

*Author of "How the Young Ones Die."*

REPORT made by the gentleman Jaques Constant d'Erlot, ship's captain of the Fifth Class, in command of His Majesty's Ship *Ceres* to *Monsieur la Marquis* Desherbiers de l'Estanduere, Admiral of the Fleet in the roads at Quiberon:

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS:

In conformity with your Orders, I have the honor to submit the present Report, designed to render you an accounting in full of the Mission you deigned to entrust to me, and which I successfully discharged for the King's Service from Tuesday April 12th, on which date you informed me by signal that I was at liberty to depart for my secret destination, until the present May 6th, when I am safe returned again under your flag, my task accomplished, with all thanks to God's Mercy.

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS:

Having set sail with the *Ceres* on the date above-mentioned, and having proceeded south-southwest by Compass, by the course you had laid for me, I kept to that course for about 120 miles, until the following noon, to be exact, under a fresh northerly breeze. Thus running free, the *Ceres* comported herself as might be expected of a Frigate so slight of scantling and pierced for no more than fourteen Muzzles in all. She kept to seven and eight knots without effort, the careening you had but recently permitted me to execute having cleared our bottom of the Weed, Shells, Barnacles, and other Vermin Parasites that had up to that time retarded the frigate's speed. I was accordingly able at once to presage the happy success of our Arms.

In obedience, therefore, to your verbal instructions, on Wednesday April 13th I broke the Seal of the confidential letter you had entrusted to my care. As you must know, I found therein the Order, in good form, and countersigned by My Lord, the Admiral of France, Count of Toulouse, to pursue whithersoever it might take refuge, and promptly to exterminate, a certain Pirate ship, more often than not rigged like a Brigantine, and flaunting a Black Flag adorned with white Death's Heads, the said Brigantine alternately displaying, according to place, season, and occasion, divers names to wit: The *Crow*, the *Peacock*, the *Gull*, or the *Falcon*. This Brigantine of many disguises had more than once merited the King's anger by capturing, pillaging, burning and running to the bottom numerous French Merchantmen which all the clauses and privileges of their well-ordered Sailing Licenses had not been able to preserve from the Murderous fury of these impious Bandits. Accordingly, His Majesty, being resolved to establish a fitting degree of security on all waters whereon the French flag is flown, gave orders and commands to all his Captains, to attack and capture the said Pirate Vessel wheresoever

* *This is an Off-the-Trail story.* *See footnote on first contents page*



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she might take refuge. And you, Monsieur le Marquis, entrusted to me in particular the immediate execution of His Majesty's Orders.

With the sealed packet containing these Commands were several messages from your hand, pointing out as highly probable that the Pirate was at that moment still in the vicinity of the west coast of Ireland, despatches from the region relating divers of his Crimes. As I was then in latitude 44° 20′ north, by longitude 9° 40′ west—that is to say a good distance south and east of the course—I made haste to set our helm west-northwest, so as to bring our Frigate into the Wind. The entire day of the thirteenth, as of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth, we beat our way toward the Irish coast, which the Lookout sighted on the morning of the eighteenth, in latitude 52° 10′ north, by longitude 13° 15′ west. Throughout these many hours to windward the *Ceres* displayed her finest Sailing Qualities, as I may apprize Your Lordship.

On the evening of the 18th of April, I cast anchor in eight fathom of water on a sand and gravel bottom near the mouth of an open Roadstead, not far from a village inscribed as "Clifden" on the chart. I ordered the water-casks to be filled and had some Conversation with the inhabitants, who welcomed me with right Good-will. The Pirate had, it seemed, been sighted the the week before off this Very coast. He had even, on several occasions, pushed his Boldness to the point of casting anchor within musket shot of the shore, and, with no heed to possible reprizals, had landed and levied contributions on the village. Shortly thereafter two frigates belonging to His Britannic Majesty had vainly scoured all the bays and hiding-places of that Coast without discovering any hull of suspicious aspect. The British frigates had thereupon set sail together, making for the Hebrides, convinced that the Brigantine they were pursuing must have taken refuge in these Islands, and that without doubt it received help from the native fisherfolk; for it is well known that the said natives are Savages by nature and Shipwreckers by trade, and their principal means of subsistence not so much the fish they catch as the wrecks they salvage after having, through treacherous and shifting Watch Fires, caused the destruction of the unhappy vessels they first draw off their courses. Nevertheless, in my own private opinion, I held it little likely that any pirates would be so Foolish as to choose an archipelago remote from all maritime routes of travel, as the center of their activities, and concluded that I was then and there just where I needed to be in order promptly to satisfy the King's desires.

It was then I devised the ruse which finally won us the Success of our enterprise. Having questioned the people of Clifden closely as to the manner of navigating of English frigates, and having thereby well convinced the population of that place that it was my intention to imitate these frigates in their strategy, I took on provisions, filled my water casks and, to all appearances, made off to northward as though purposing to skirt the Irish coast and make for the Hebrides. But some twenty-five miles beyond the Bay of Clifden lies the vast Bay of Clewes, so thick-sown with Reefs and Shoals that it is the curse of Navigators and even of simple fisher- and sailormen. There I lay to, certain that no one would ever suspect such a redoubtable spot of sheltering the *Ceres* in ambush.

After a few prudent soundings I cast anchor at the entrance to the Roads, behind a Desert Island on which rose a high growth of trees. This land was on the chart called Clare Island, and was to serve me both as mask and shelter. In this spot, accordingly, I lay in wait, convinced that in a short while favorable news would come to reward my Patience.

And indeed I did not have to exercise the latter over-long. Fortunately it happpened that I had guessed even closer to the Mark than I had thought.

The success ever so faithfully in attendance upon the Arms of the King brought it about that on this occasion the Pirates, who had discovered in this very Bay of Clewes a Channel, winding and difficult, but nevertheless Practicable, especially at certain hours of the ebb tide, should betake themselves to their hiding-place. It was on the evening of the 24th of April that I had cast anchor off Clare Island. On the morning of the 26th, at the hour of scouring the decks and making all shipshape, the Lookout in the crow's nest sighted a Sail in the very midst of the reefs in the inner bay. I instantly verified the truth of this report, and recognized that the Brigantine sighted was

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of a size and rigging similar in all points to those of the vessel I had been directed to pursue and capture. I at once took measures for overhauling it. But, before the *Ceres* could get under sail, the Pirate, carried along by the turning tide, the force of which was doubled by a strong east wind, sheered off out of our reach and made for the Open. I had not been able to pay out cable for fear of drifting onto the ledges off the Island. I was forced therefore to cast a grapple from the stern. And what with all this delay, the Brigantine had the advantage of three or four miles before we were in a condition to give chase.

But a sudden veering of the Wind thereupon favored us greatly, the breeze shifting from the easterly to the south-easterly quarter, and stiffening to a strong Gale. The *Ceres*, stouter of scantling than the enemy, rolled and pitched less than the latter, and began to make up the distance she had lost. Soon, through my spy-glass, I could make out the Brigantine's name written in red on the black of the taffrail: *Corbeau*. My last doubts vanished.

Toward two of the afternoon, we were within cannon range, and I yawed for a shot of warning, according to regulations aiming at the Royal Ensign flying from the gaff. The fugitive paying no heed, I despatched a Summons. The pirate thereupon had the impertinence to reply, firing off two batteries she unmasked in her stern, and filling our sails with holes.

Fearing of receiving some possible Damage which would, if I might say so, clip our wings and save that black bird from our falcon's Talons, I stood off four points and fired a Broadside, aiming at the enemy's masts. The brigantine continued to flee. But after a few shots, her main-mast crumpled. I expected thereupon to see that Rabble Crew, now that they were in distress, lower their long boats and attempt a doubtful escape by dint of a Desperate plying of the oars, no other hope remaining. But I mistook them. The Pirates displayed a courage I could never have expected from their like, destitute of all honor as such Rabble are. They lay to, unmasked all their guns, inferior in number and size to our own, and answered our fire, not neglecting, in response to our Fleur de Lys, to display their hideous Death's Head, nailing it to the poop in a fashion I have rarely seen equalled even by the brave Servitors of the King!

A hot contest ensued, in the course of which, I regret to inform you, our losses were Considerable, amounting to eight killed, one an Officer, and thirteen wounded, among the latter a Quartermaster of Artillery. The courage displayed by the Pirates was extreme and beyond all reason. Their mast gone, their ship taking in water, their decks running with blood, they nevertheless did not for a moment cease firing off their guns, and increased our losses far beyond such as a Loyal Adversary would have inflicted in Fair Fight. Despairing of putting an end to the contest before dark, and resolved, whatever the cost, to satisfy the King's express wishes, I maneuvered so as to board the Pirate. My first lieutenant, Monsieur de Soria, had the honor to lead the Boarding Party. The division, with reenforcements, jumped to the brigantine's deck, and, sword in hand, cut down the pirates to the last man, not one of them surrendering. It was at this point that the Singular Incident occurred, the recounting of which will doubtless cause you to pardon the length of the present Report.

The last of the Pirates had perished in front of the door leading into the poop cabin. This door they had defended with singular Pertinacity, and as though anxious to protect it even to their dying breath. The entire troop brought low however, Monsieur de Soria deemed it of interest to break down the door, and prudent to enter pistol in hand, for it seemed highly probable that the poop cabin concealed Some One or something of a nature, to say the least, Unholy. Several of our men entered the cabin with the first lieutenant; and the surprise of all was lively indeed. The room serving as Captain's cabin—as indicated by numerous books, charts, and instruments contained therein—was at that moment occupied by a young and handsome Lady, who, richly dressed, bejewelled, painted and powdered, sat in a brocaded armchair and without a sign whether of anger or of contentment, watched the approach of the Victors.

Uncertain as to whether he stood in the presence of one of the pirate's Prisoners or one of their Accomplices, Monsieur de Soria straightway called upon the lady to Explain herself; to which her sole reply was the firing of a shot which caused Monsieur de

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Soria to fall, Grievously wounded and streaming with blood. It was then perceived, somewhat tardily, that the lady's white and slender hands were holding two pistols which she knew well how to use. Two others lay beside her, in such wise that it cost four men Disabled to capture this Fury so otherwise gracious in appearance. My sailors conducted her, properly handcuffed, to me. She thereupon did not hesitate to boast of being, not a prisoner or accomplice of pirates, but a Pirate herself, worse, the Leader of the Pirates, and the very Captain, *Capitaine* or *Capitane*—I know not which to call her—of that *Corbeau* or *Crow* that, according to her whim, became now a *Peacock* or *Gull*, now *Kingfisher* or *Falcon*. In addition, she very complacently and learnedly proved to me that she was in all respects what she boasted of being—namely: A remarkable Navigator, well versed in modern theories of navigation on the High Seas, in the Working of a Ship, and in Nautical Astronomy!

Being now Enlightened, I gave orders to hang this *capitane* or female ship's captain without further ceremony, for she was incontestably Guilty of more crimes than are required to justify the hanging of a round dozen of pirates of the Opposite Sex. The condemned female made no objection save to beg me, with extreme Civility, to hang with her and from the same yard-arm, two of her Former Companions and Subordinates, whom she described to me and of whom one was found dead and the other seriously wounded. Judging that I could with Propriety satisfy this last and legitimate request of a creature who must frequently have made requests far less reasonable and to which doubtless many a man had held it an honor to conform, I Granted her prayer. The three ropes being made ready and the three Nooses passed around the necks of the Condemned, I sent for our Almoner, who, in accordance with his usual good mercy, came, Crucifix in hand. The Woman Pirate willingly kissed the holy effigy; but she thereupon besought the Favor of similarly laying her lips upon the mouths of her two gibbet Companions who, she contended, were even more desirous of obtaining from her this final and superficial pleasure than was our Lord Himself.

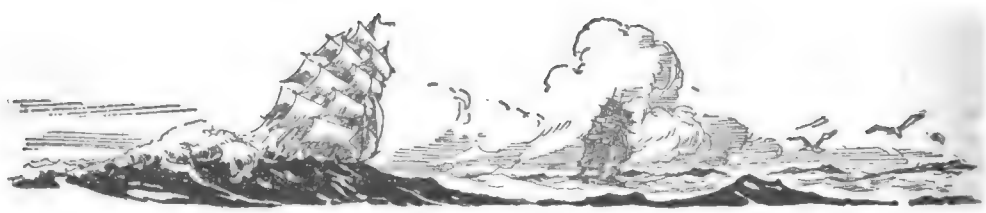
I cut short this sacrilegious Chatter by the means you can readily imagine.

Whereupon, the other pirates, whether wounded or dead, having been likewise Strung from the yard-arm and the brigantine set Afire, I gave orders to get under way, and steered a course designed to bring us as soon as possible under your Flag.

I have the Honor, Monsieur le Marquis, to be, with profound respect, your very humble, very obedient, and very faithful servant.

(Signed) JAQUES CONSTANT D'ERLOT,
Captain of *Ceres*.

On board His Majesty's ship *Ceres*, in the Roads of Quiberon, this sixth of May, *anno domini* 1689.



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# The SPOOK

by Arthur O. Friel

*Author of "Hardwood," "Cat o' Mountain," etc.*

THE sudden gunshot which shattered the kitchen window of Ed Cole reverberated in the hills for a fortnight. And the heavy charge, though it flew not more than ten feet, struck men who dwelt a mile away.

Half the habitants of the crag-bound mountain settlement heard that ominous roar, for it smashed the stillness of bedtime and rolled far along the ledges. Every man and woman still awake turned a listening ear toward the outer dark. Every dog of mature years and experience, well aware that late August was not the cooning season, barked puzzled protest. Then the echoes died. The ceaseless chorus of crickets and katydids again became audible. Once more reigned the peace of summer night.

Day brought the shock. A millstone quarrier, passing Cole's somewhat isolated cottage, observed that its door stood open; called a couple of times, received no answer, walked in, and came out on the run. In the little kitchen where Ed had been wont to sit, table and chair now were overturned; glass splinters from the inblown window-pane littered the floor; the well-worn planks were smeared with a huge blotch of blood. Other evidences of violence and haste lay about the room, but the discoverer paused not to examine them. Up the sandy road he sprinted to the home of the nearest neighbor. By noon it was bruited to the farthest houses of the scattered community that Ed Cole had been assassinated through his window, carried away, and, presumably hidden in some unknown cavern or crevasse.

Everywhere the report evoked mingled anger and amazement; anger, because shooting in the dark was decidedly unfashionable thereabouts; amazement, because Ed had no known enemies. True, he was not held in particularly high esteem, being regarded as somewhat shiftless. He seldom worked and often borrowed. On the other hand, he did virtually nothing to incur a load of buckshot in the back. So now all his world wondered why and by whom he could have been shot down at his own table.

Before sundown the first half of this question was answered. The news, creeping along the winding roads and trails, reached to a recently established summer hotel two miles away, the owners of which sometimes purchased tracts of forested land. Back came the tidings that the hotel men had just bought from Ed Cole sixty acres of rugged country—all the land he possessed, except the little roadside clearing where stood his house—and that yesterday they had paid him three thousand dollars. He had refused a check, insisting on cash. And cash they had given him; a fat roll of bills. With this he had gone home.

Thus the motive for his slaying became appallingly clear. It was a thing at which the hills rumbled with rage. The killing of a man in private vengeance or public brawl was quite comprehensible and, sometimes, excusable in the stony Shawangunks. But this matter of cold-blooded murder in the consummation of robbery was altogether too ugly. It was the sort of thing which

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took place in cities and in settlements of "furriners," but not in these uplands. The natural wrath aroused by the deed itself was augmented by the realization that not Ed alone, but many of his fellows, had suffered through its commission. For Ed owed money far and wide among them, and the sold acres had been the security on which he borrowed.

That timber land, left him by an industrious father, he had intended to log off whenever he should get around to it. With the coming of the hotel people, however, he had scented a less laborious way of reaping financial harvest and had bided his time. Meanwhile, by promises oral or written, he had gleaned dollars here and there until his aggregate debt had become quite sizable. That he would eventually discharge his obligations, with interest, none of his creditors had doubted; for he never had shown any disposition to deny his responsibilities. On the contrary, he had cheerfully promised to square them all up when he could. And now land, money, and man were gone. Thus, that shot in the night had hit, financially if not physically, many a hillman besides the lone bachelor.

The talk of those who gathered at his house to view the evidence was bitter. It became all the more so when one of them picked from the floor a soiled sheet of paper and discovered thereon a partial list of names and sums owed. The last name was incomplete, with a sudden black line jerking upward as if something had struck the elbow of the writer.

"Ed, he was a-settin' here a-figgerin' up what he owed to everybody," deduced the finder. "He was a-goin' to start out today, I bet ye, an' pay up. By gorry, the pore feller was honest, warn't he? He didn't git that money till late into the day, an' after supper he begun workin' on to his debts. An' then that sneakin' copperhead outside done for him. By mighty, the feller that done it had ought to be kilt slow, like the Injuns used to do! Plain hangin' or shootin's too good for him!"

A growl of assent. Followed a series of guarded conjectures as to the identity of the assassin. On this topic men took thought before they spoke; for the unknown killer might even be among them at that moment, coolly noting the trend of opinion. After a time, however, the advancement of surmises by some and their blunt rejection by others led to a lessening of caution and to tart rejoinders. Tempers warmed. Then two of them flared.

A stoop-shouldered, narrow-eyed individual who had been propounding the theory that the slayer was some wandering outsider, only to have his idea ridiculed by a straight-standing young fellow from up the road, rounded on the latter with a venomous sneer.

"Wal, seein' ye know so much 'bout it, Job Briggs," he rasped, "s'posin' ye tell us jest whar Ed's a-layin' an' what's come o' the money."

Dead silence. Job Briggs, his brown eyes wide, stood astounded. The other, head forward and mouth quirked in a malicious grin, went on:

"Ed, he owed ye more'n anybody else, 'cordin' to what I hear. An' he had to come past yore house to git home from the hotel. Mebbe ye knowed he made that sale, hey? An' ye was into the war jest a few year ago an' got used to killin' fellers, didn't ye? Used to be a sharpshooter, I've hearn tell, an' shot fellers that warn't a-lookin'—"

*SMACK-SMACK!* Job Briggs' fists cracked on the virulent mouth and under the unshaven jaw. Stoop-Shoulders thudded asprawl on the floor. Only the interposition of three able-bodied men saved him from a thorough thrashing. Those three had their hands full with the infuriated young warrior, but held him until his prey had time to scramble groggily from the house. After the departure of his defamer Job regained partial control of himself.

"Yas, I was into the war an' I kilt my men, but I never bushwhacked nobody through a winder," he panted. "An' if I hear 'nother yap like that outen any o' ye I'll knock ye so fur it'll take ye a week to git back!"

"Aw, nobody b'lieves ye had any hand into this, Job," he was earnestly assured.

"Nobody'd better!"

Job glared around him, then, finding nothing at which to take further umbrage, cooled down.

"As fur's the money's concerned," he continued, "I lost more'n any o' ye—Ed owed me more'n three hundred dollars, if ye want to know it. I took his notes. An' he didn't stop to my house yesterday or tell me

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nothin' 'bout sellin' out. Fust I heard of it was today. I'm a-wonderin' why he didn't stop in an' say somethin' 'bout squarin' up, seein' he went right by my door."

A thoughtful silence. Then somebody hazarded:

"Mebbe he wanted to git home an' play with his money awhile 'fore he begun to split it up. He never see so much of it into all his life."

"Nor me neither," muttered several men.

"Mebbe so," conceded Job. "I don't s'pose we'll ever find out now. Wal, I'm a-goin' home. If any o' you wise owls can figger out who kilt Ed, lemme know. But don't ye spill no more talk that Job Briggs done it, or there'll be some more smashed faces 'round here."

He strode out. The others, after vainly going over the whole house in search of some clue, followed. They talked, smoked, chewed, agreed and disagreed, got nowhere, and finally dispersed.

Their disputations did not cease, however, with their departure from the premises. For the ensuing two weeks the whole community simmered with ponderous opinions and flighty guesses, openly expressed and heatedly debated. Under the surface ran silent suspicions, settling now on this man, now on that. Meanwhile not an inch of progress was made. The killer remained undiscovered, the whereabouts of his victim and his loot undisclosed. So, presently, the discussion flagged and virtually died out.

Yet the mystery remained very much alive in minds if not on tongues. Indeed, the passage of time served to deepen its somberness, as imagination dwelt on known and unknown details. One of these, at first overlooked, was the fact that Ed's dog also had vanished. An ordinary hound, he was, and practically worthless—old, stiff, and sour-tempered—but, for all that, the inseparable companion of his master. Like that master, he had disappeared between dusk and dawn on the fatal night, and no trace of him had since been found. What had become of him was one more question to baffle groping minds and to add to the strangeness of the tragedy.

With these dark problems unanswered, a shadow hung over the settlement by day and deepened into a sinister shroud by night. Men traveling the road after dark walked with nerves alert. Women left alone locked their doors and curtained their windows. Children passing the silent Cole house in broad daylight went at a dead run. Whether or not it was their childish terror which first invested that forlorn little cottage with an atmosphere of dread, an aversion to the place grew upon their elders. Soon it was left severely alone, squatting in its own gloom and hiding within its weather-beaten walls the mute testimony of the fate of its owner; a dingy thing to be viewed askance in the hours of light, and thereafter shunned.

Meanwhile, at his own cheerful home half a mile away, Job Briggs paused now and then in his methodical farm work to stand scowling at nothing, or, in the evening, smoked his pipe and gave scant heed to the talk of his mother and his wife. Since that day when he knocked the sneer down the throat of Stoop-Shoulders nobody had hinted, or even thought, that he had been implicated in the crime; but the insinuation rankled. Nor was this the only angle of the affair that irked him. The loss of his money was, naturally, one of them, although he could stand this buffet better than most of his acquaintances; his farm was prosperous, and, through some shrewd land deals, he had put aside considerable money. At the same time, he was a thrifty chap, and a bad investment galled him. Moreover, he still was irritated by the unexplained failure of Ed Cole to drop in on his homeward way and at least break the news of his long-hoped-for sale. Ed hadn't been quite square about that, he felt. All in all, the thing stuck in his crop.

Since he could evolve no method of dislodging this troublesome lump, it remained stuck. It still was bothering him when, as he sat smoking one night in September, his door was suddenly thrown open and a man leaped in. The intruder's tanned face was pallid, his eyes wide, his breath coming fast. Job, after one glance, laid down his pipe.

"'LO, SAM," he drawled. "What's ailin' ye?"

"I—I—I see Ed Cole's ghost!"

"Huh?" Job stared. "Ghost? What ye been a-drinkin', Sam?"

"Nary a drop! ' tell ye, I see it as plain as I'm a-seein' you! Into his kitchen, it was; right where he got shot! An' it come right for me! Urrrgh!" He shuddered and threw a glance at the darkness behind him.

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Job walked over to him and audibly sniffed at his breath. The only odor he could detect was that of tobacco. Sam's pallor gave way to a flush.

"Think I'm drunk, do ye? Say, lookit here, ye know I ain't no drinkin' man—not reg'lar—an' ye know I ain't no hand to b'lieve into spooks, neither. An' now ye've had a sniff at me ye know I'm sober, don't ye?" Job nodded. "An' I'm a-tellin' ye the honest truth. I see Ed, a-standin' on to his feet an' a-walkin' at me, an' deader'n a herrin'! His face was all holler an'— Oh, my gorry, he was the gashliest sight I ever see!"

Again he sneaked a glance at the night. Job still stared. He knew Sam to be a rather hard-headed fellow with courage as good as that of most men. It must have taken something extraordinary to give him so bad a scare.

"Wal, set down, an' I'll git ye a little drink," he invited.

Sam sat, but immediately arose again, unable to keep still. When Job brought a cupful of corn whisky he gulped it at one huge swallow.

"Now how come ye to see this thing?" his host quizzed.

"I was a-goin' by an' I see a light. 'Twarn't a bright light—kind o' dim an' spooky—but 'twas into the house. An' thinks I, I bet that's the feller that kilt Ed, a-lookin' for somethin' he didn't git, an' if I can git a sight of him I'll know who he is. So I snuck up awful easy to git a look. I dasn't go into the house, 'cause I ain't got even a jackknife on to me, an' mebbe he'd have a gun. But I went 'long by the winder an' took a peek. An' by gorry, there was Ed, a-lookin' right out at me. An' he grinned the awfulest grin ye ever see,—kind o' like a dawg jest a-goin' to bite—an' his hands riz up with his fingers all crooked like claws, an' he come right for me, a-movin' like a snake—sort o' slidin', ye know. Wal, I give a jump, an' the next thing I knowed I was way up the road, runnin' like the devil was after me. An'—wal, here I be."

Job observed him closely as he talked. It was evident that he told truth, or what he believed to be truth.

"What made the light? A lamp, or a lantern, or what?"

"I—I dunno, Job. I didn't see nothin' a-burnin', as I can remember. 'Twas jest a kind of a ghosty light. But I see him plain."

Job picked up his pipe, relighted it, and puffed thoughtfully.

"Wal, now I want to borry yer gun, Job," resumed the other. "I've got to git home, an' I've got to go by Ed's house to git there. An' I ain't a-goin' empty-handed; not after what I jest see down there."

"I'll go 'long with ye," decided Job. "I'd like to git a look—"

"Job!" broke in both his wife and his mother together. "Ye ain't a-goin'!"

To which the older woman added:

"Lawd 'a' mercy, with sech goin's on it's yore place to stay to home an' pertect yer own house. Next thing we know we'll all be—"

"Aw, hush up," he cut her off. "We never done no harm to Ed, an' Ed'll never do none to us. Lock the door, if ye want to, till I git back. Come on, Sam."

Rifle under arm, he swung out, leaving feminine protest behind. Sam followed close. Down the darksome road they trudged, speaking only once, when Sam muttered—

"Gashliest thing I ever see, Job, an' I don't want to see it no more."

To which the young veteran shortly replied—"If ye'd gone to war ye'd of seen things wuss'n that."

Thereafter they trod in silence.

The night was moonless, but clear and starlit. The sandy road lay plain enough before them, empty of all life, bordered by dusky brush. When they reached the opening wherein stood the Cole house, that ominous structure also was visible, though a trifle vague to their dark-dilated eyes. No light showed there now. Its few small windows merged with its blank, shadowy walls. About it hung the same atmosphere of loneliness and funereal gloom as on any other night. The two men stood awhile in the road, watching and listening.

"Guess yer spook's gone to bed," dryly commented Job. "An' I guess we better do the same. But I'll kind o' nose round a little fust. Go 'long home, Sam."

Sam swallowed noisily.

"I—wal, I guess I'll smell round too," he said, as if forcing the words. "I'm kind o' curious, like."

Job gave him a glance of mounting respect. He knew Sam wished to go as fast and as far from that spot as he could; and

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he appreciated the sort of courage that carried on in the face of fear. However, he made no answer. Softly he drifted toward the house. Nor did Sam lag. He stole onward shoulder to shoulder with his fellow hillman. Step by step they approached until they were at the corner; crept along to the fateful kitchen window, and there stopped beside the casing. For a long minute they listened again, peering slantwise at the broken glass. No light, no sound. But through the shot-smashed pane floated a smell. It was faint, but unmistakable; the infernal reek of sulfur.

As that odor assailed his nostrils Sam shivered uncontrollably. For a few seconds he fought to master his terror. Then he lost his grip.

"Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh!" he quavered, shuddering audibly. "It's the s-s-smell o' the g-g-ghost! He's buried into this house, Ed is—into the sus-sus-cellar, most likely—an' he's a-hantin' it! His spook comes right up out o' huh-huh-hell, all fire an' br-r-rimstun! Wah!"

With that final inarticulate howl he bolted. A rush of feet through the grass, a frantic pounding of soles in the road, and he was gone.

Job, too, was gone from the spot where he had stood. That sudden panic-stricken wail at his ear was enough to make any man leap aside. But he did not run. After his involuntary bound away from the spook-seer he crouched a minute, watching Sam flee and braced for any other fearsome development. Then, angry at himself, he made a move somewhat rash. With bold tread—albeit with rifle ready—he strode to the unlocked rear door, kicked it open, and tramped into the haunted house.

The interior seemed black as the proverbial pocket. Perforce he slowed, feeling his way with his feet, meanwhile striving to pierce the gloom. As his sight readjusted itself he could discern shadowy outlines of rude furniture; nothing else. Presently he stood still, holding his breath, straining his ears. So quiet was the place that even the breathing of a mouse, it seemed, must be plainly audible; but not even that tiny sound came to him. A feeling of emptiness pervaded the room. Only that fume of sulfur betokened the recent presence of anything human or demoniac.

Resuming motion, he worked onward, poking about all three of the rooms comprising the ground floor. He had brought no lantern, nor even a match, so that he could not strike a light. He satisfied himself, however, that no living thing was hiding there. Listening at the foot of the stairs leading to the tiny attic, he became assured that this recess also was vacant. Remained only the cellar. At the thought of entering that clammy hole, however, both resolution and common sense balked.

To go down those stairs without a light would be senseless, for in that subterranean blackness he would be utterly blind. And, despite himself, the eeriness of the house was gnawing at his nerves. He had had enough of it. Wherefore, after a halt to listen and sniff at the top of the dark stairway, he closed its door and went out in the the sweet air and the dim starlight.

"Somethin' funny 'round here," he admitted. "Come daylight, I'm a-goin' to snoop some more."

Back up the road he trudged to his home. There he laughed at his anxious womenfolk, told them he had gone all through the Cole house without seeing anything queer, and went to bed. Rising soon after dawn, he returned to the haunted house, invaded its cellar, and, by the daylight filtering in at a couple of diminutive windows, gave it a searching inspection. He found nothing of the slightest value.

The damp earth floor was smooth and hard-packed. The rough stone walls were firm, without one loose rock. Obviously, Sam's lurid prediction had been merely the figment of frenzied imagination. Not even the odor of sulfur now remained in the air, either below or above stairs.

"Huh!" grunted the investigator, disgustedly. And he returned home, ate breakfast, and took up his day's work. He "warn't a-goin' to waste no more time a-chasin' spooks, by mighty!"

YET, as the day wore on, he kept pausing to frown and wrestle with his thoughts. The thing which recently had been sticking in his crop now was doubly bothersome. Ed Cole's spook was outwitting him. More than ever he felt that Ed alive had also outguessed him. The two thoughts nagged at him until they merged into one. Late in the day he started and blinked as if dazzled by a sudden light.

"Gorramighty!" he ejaculated.

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Forthwith he dug up his pipe, loaded and lit and smoked it. When it had burned out he chuckled.

"Yup, I bet that's the answer," he informed a bumblebee which chanced to be near. "An' seein' as how the things that's been a-goin' on down to Ed's place had happened kind of early into the night, mebbe somethin' more'll come 'long 'bout the same time. I won't lose an awful lot o' sleep if I lay round there awhile an' keep an eye peeled."

Soon after dark, therefore, he ambled down the road, carrying his rifle and an unlighted lantern. At the spooky house he scouted a little, then lay down in the shadow of some neighboring pines, whence he could watch the windows.

Long hours dragged past. At times he heard the patter of little feet in the woods behind him, or the rustle of larger animals moving about in their nocturnal foraging. Twice sounded a mumble of male voices passing along the road, and once the plod of hoofs and the grind of wheels. From the house, though, came not the slightest indication of the presence of anything human or inhuman. Around it droned the insect chorus, its monotonous rhythm laden with somnolence. The hidden watcher found his lids growing heavy.

Another half hour, and the motionless vigil became a weight on his brain. If he could have walked post, or even stood erect, the sentry work would not have been so burdensome; but to lie prone was to fight off slumber by sheer power of will. All the rest of the hill-folk were in bed by now; the road was silent and deserted, the night air soundless save for the harmony of bug-voices. Repeatedly he yawned. It was high time to quit and go home to bed, he realized. Yet, with innate stubbornness, he hated to give up. At length he compromised by letting his head sink and his eyes close.

He rested longer than he had intended. He did not sleep; but he drowsed a bit, temporarily losing close touch with his surroundings. When he roused to full wakefulness he felt that some time had slipped past. A look at the house revealed nothing new. Disgusted, chilled by dew, he rose to go. Then he froze.

Behind a glassless cellar window gleamed a light.

Very tiny was that window, very low, and partly screened by uncut grass; hardly visible to a man standing, and altogether out of sight to one lying down. And the light was so dim as to seem spectral. Yet it was not evanescent; it remained steady. Job's heart jumped, and he took a stride toward the illumination. One foot struck against his momentarily forgotten lantern. It tumbled over, its wire bail clinking sharply against the globe.

Muttering something, he continued his advance. He had covered only a few more yards when the cellar window went black.

Job halted short, narrowly watching the aperture for whatever might come—a reappearance of the phantasmal sheen, perhaps, or something more menacing, such as the glint of starlight on a gun-barrel. The opening remained blank. Keeping his eyes fixed on it, he backed to his upset hand-lamp and picked it up. Then he dashed to the rear door. There he swiftly ignited the wick, ran his left forearm through the bail, and, with gun up, stepped quietly into the house.

Beyond the threshold he paused, a scant ten feet from the cellar-way. Its door, left closed when he had departed that morning, now stood wide open.

Minutes snailed away while he stood there motionless, gaze riveted on that gaping rectangle. From it floated only the damp scent of underground; no footfall, no stealthy movement, no rustle or breath rose to betray any creature lurking there. Yet he sensed on the stairs a hostile presence crouching and waiting.

Softly he drew the lantern from his arm and set it on the near-by stove. Moving inch by inch, he crept toward the stairway. His feet shifted without a sound; but under his weight the old planks emitted faint creaks. He had moved perhaps half the distance when, loud and awful in the oppressive stillness, out broke a shuddering groan.

He froze again. So ghastly was the noise that his hair stirred. A few seconds of silence, and it came again. And now from the stairs sounded a crawling scrape and ghostly thumps, mounting with unnerving slowness toward the top.

"Wh-wh-who's there?" he demanded, an involuntary quiver in his tone.

A long moan replied. Then spoke a low, sepulchral voice.

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"Mu-u-urder! A dead man comin' to drag ye into the grave! A-a-a-ah!"

The ghost-hunter remained frozen. But his jaws were clamped like a steel trap and his tight-drawn gaze unwinking. Nearer, nearer drew that fearful creep. Then, with a sudden spring, through the doorway emerged the ghost of Ed Cole.

It was just as Sam had described it: hollow-eyed, teeth showing in a downward grin, hands lifted and curved like great talons poising to clutch and rend. Job fell back a pace. But the apparition, despite its frightfulness, was not itself immune to fear. At sight of the gun-muzzle trained on its body it seemed to petrify.

FOR a few seconds each stood like a statue. Then, through his teeth, Job gritted—

"Ed, mebbe ye're a-livin' an' mebbe ye ain't, but 'less'n ye act human inside o' ten seconds I'm a-goin' to slam a bullet through ye to make sure. I'm a-countin'."

The spook shrank back. The hard tone and the set face of the man behind the gun proved that he meant his words. Five seconds slid past. Then the specter threw its arm defensively across its body.

"Don't ye shoot, Job!" it implored. "I'm a-livin'! P'int that 'ere gun somewheres else!"

The rifle wavered slightly, but held its aim, as Job relaxed.

"Any more spooks down yender?" he snapped.

"Nope—not a thing—ain't nobody here but me." The erstwhile fantom glanced furtively about as if meditating a dash from the house. Job's eyes narrowed.

"Wal, we'll both go back down there," he decided. "I want to talk to ye a mite, an' that's as good a place as any. Ain't so many doors an' winders down b'low. Git!"

He seized his lantern. Ed turned and, with his captor following, descended the worn treads up which he had so awesomely come. At their base Job peered all around. On the earth he saw a lightless lantern and a coarse sack; that was all. Hanging his light on a convenient nail, he eyed his prisoner.

"Wal, Mister Spook Ed Cole, 'twas a pretty bright trick o' yourn, warn't it? Ye outsmarted everybody for awhile, didn't ye? Ye hadn't no intention o' payin' up yer debts, but ye made things look like ye did, an' then ye went outside an' murdered yerself through yer winder. Ain't that right?"

Ed muttered a hangdog assent.

"Ye figgered it all out ahead o' time," pursued Job, "even to makin' out a kind of a bill ag'in yerself an' jabbin' yer pencil sudden like somethin' had hit ye into the back. Yas, 'twas pretty bright, as fur's it went. I didn't see through it myself till today, an' nobody else s'spicions ye yit. But why in tarnation didn't ye clear outen here an' stay out, 'stead o' comin' back an' playin' spook? An' where ye been a-hidin' all o' this time?"

"I—wal, I got scairt, Job," confessed the absconder. "I laid awhile into a little cave up back here that I'd fixed up a-purpose, 'cause I thought there'd be an awful row kicked up an' the folks down into the valley would hear 'bout it, an' if I went down there too soon I'd git caught. If I laid low till things got quieted down a mite mebbe I could git out then an' go 'way somewheres. But it seemed like things was ag'inst me. Jest lately I tried three times to git outen the hills, an' every time I jest barely dodged some feller that knowed me. Seemed like every way I turned there was somebody a-layin' for me. An' then the more I thought 'bout it the more scairt I got about goin' away where I didn't know nobody an' I'd prob'ly git kilt or robbed or arrested the fust thing. Ye know how it is."

The other slowly nodded. He himself had been out in the world and had no fear of it. But he could well understand the deep-rooted aversion of such untraveled hillmen as Ed, who never had slept a night outside their native environment, against plunging alone into that vast menacing region outside—a land where, they imagined, the hand of every man would be against them. Yes, he knew how it was. However, his present mood was unsympathetic.

"Ye pore rat!" he growled. "'Fraid o' yer own shadder! I sh'd think ye'd of scairt yerself to death when ye turned spook. How come ye to do that?"

"Wal, my vittles run out. I didn't have a snitch left to eat, an' I come down here last night to git some stuff outen my garden. But fust I come into the house to see if I could find some tobacker an' matches. An' I'd jest got some matches an' lit the lantern—I kep' it turned way down low an' set it

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clus to the wall—an' I was a-figgerin' onto somethin' to smoke, when I hearn somebody's feet a slidin' up through the grass. I didn't have no time to git out o' sight, so I done the other thing. Soon as I see a face outside I went toward it, a-makin' the wust face I knowed how. An' he run." The spook snickered. "Gorramighty, how he skedaddled outen here! Who was it? I couldn't see him plain."

"Sam Shoemaker. He run clear to my house with his tongue a-hangin' out a yard." Job, too, chuckled. "An' I come back with him. But ye was gone by that time, o' course. What made that stink o' sulfur?"

"Matches. I figgered somebody'd come, an' I lit a hull card o' them seven-day stinkers to once an' then blowed 'em out, so's to make it smell like hell-fire round here. An' then I put for the woods, a-grabbin' some corn on to the way."

"An' wha'd ye come back tonight for? There ain't no vittles into this cellar."

"Nope, but there's some ol' bags, an' I come for one o' them. There it is, over yender. I figgered to fill it up with things outen the garden an' tote it up to my hidey-hole an' give my stummick somethin' to gnaw onto. I'm awful hungry, Job."

The ghost-layer felt a fleeting twinge of pity, but his gruff reply did not reveal it.

"Spooks ain't s'posed to eat nothin'. An' a live thief don't deserve nothin'. Still an' all, ye've got money 'nough to eat hearty a long time, even after ye pay up all yer debts. Ye don't owe no three thousand dollars, do ye?"

"No. I don't owe a thousand, all told. But gorramighty, I can't—I can't face these fellers round here now! I—I—"

"Ye've got to!"

ED SQUIRMED, probing the stern countenance before him.

"But I jest can't, I tell ye! I'll pay up—I'll send 'em their money—but I got to git away—"

"Huh! Yas, I guess so! Ye'll pay up 'fore ye git away, not after. An' I'll take mine right now."

The prisoner wriggled again. Then across his haggard face flitted a look of cunning.

"Aw, be reasonable, Job. I tell ye what: I'll give ye a thousand, right into yer hand, if ye'll lemme go. An'—wal, ye can do what ye want to then. Seein' as how nobody but you knows I'm a-livin', ye can keep the hull thousand if ye feel like it, an' nobody the wiser. I'll be gone; I'll git right out tonight; an' ye can use yer own jedgment 'bout givin' the money to them other fellers. Anyway I'm a-payin' up, an' that's fair 'nough, ain't it?"

A pause, while eye searched eye. Then Job's gaze moved to the other's clothing, on which showed dark stains.

"Mebbe," was his noncommittal reply. "There's one thing more I want to know: Somethin' got kilt here the night ye dis' peared, an' seein' it warn't you, what was it?"

" 'Twas ol' Jack, the dawg. Ye know, he warn't no good no more, an' he'd of died 'fore long, prob'ly. So after I got things ready I jest made him set up into the chair by the table, an' then I snuck out an' see there warn't nobody round, an' I let the buckshot go through the winder. He never knowed what hit him. Then I done him up into a burlap bag an' snuck up to the cave. Jack, he's down into a crevice way back into the ledges, where there won't nobody find him. Takin' it all round, 'twarn't a bad idee, now was it?"

He spoke a bit boastfully, seeking admiration of his cleverness. But Job's face had grown somber, and his answering tone was cold.

"Depends on to how ye look at it. Wal, I'll take that thousand. Le's have it."

"An' ye'll lemme go?"

"I said I'd take that thousand. Hurry up!"

The command struck like a fist. Ed wavered; then, reluctantly, reached inside his shirt and produced a large packet of bills.

"I'm a-trustin' ye—" he began.

"Ye needn't!"

With the words a big hand shot out and tore the whole packet from him. Wheeling, Job leaped up the stairs. On the top step he laid the money and leaned his rifle against the wall. Down again he bounded, colliding violently with Ed, who, with face convulsed, was hurling himself upward. They grappled and reeled to the bottom. There Job threw him off.

"Now, Spook," he said grimly, "stan' where ye be a minute an' I'll tell ye somethin'. That dawg Jack, he warn't much good, but he was the best friend ye had. An' ye shot him for money, ye rotten skunk! An' now ye brag about it! An' for that,

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cuss ye, an' for tryin' to make me a thief same as yerself, ye're a-goin' to git the wust lickin' o' yer hull sneakin' life, right now! An' after that I'm a-goin' to tie ye up an' keep ye tied till mornin', an' then ye're a-goin' round with me an' pay up every cent ye owe, an' then I'll kick ye clear outen these mount'ins for good an' all! That's what I'm a-goin' to do, 'less'n ye can lick me. If ye can, there's a gun an' all o' yer money on to the top step, a-waitin' for ye to come an' git 'em. Now fight, ye rat!"

He shot a punch to the face. Ed staggered back. Then, glaring and snarling, he retaliated with fierce blows. Job blocked them. But the fists became clutching hands, and in no time the pair were locked in a tearing, kicking, gouging, biting, punching backwoods rough-and-tumble. Although Ed had no reputation as a battler, he knew how to handle himself if forced to it; and now he was goaded to frenzy. A rat, Job had called him; but he fought with the stark ferocity of a rat in a corner.

They fell, writhed, wrestled, wrenched, pounded each other's head against floor or wall or staircase; heaved to their feet, slugged, trampled, strangled, clawed, back-heeled and crashed to earth; rolled, kneed, elbowed, butted, and snapped. In the end Job got his man by breaking away, rising more quickly than his antagonist, and booting him under the ear.

"Holy hickory!" he panted, mopping his disfigured face on a tattered sleeve and peering down at the sprawling form. "Did I say a rat? I meant a r'arin' wildcat!"

When his breath again came normally he teetered up the stairs, drew a pail of water, soused his head in it, then took it down and dumped it on Ed. The latter, reviving, sat up and squinted dizzily around.

"I've kind o' changed my mind, Ed," rumbled Job. "Ye ain't quite as ratty as I thought ye was. I mistrusted ye'd take yer lickin' a-snifflin' an' a-whinin', but ye fit like a man. So here's what I'm a-goin' to do; fust, take ye home an' feed ye, an' then send ye to bed. I ain't a-goin' to tie ye; I'm jest a-goin' to lock ye into the attic—there's a good bed up there—an' keep all o' yer money hid away from ye. Come mornin', I'm a-goin' to see that ye square up yer debts all 'round. Then ye can do what ye like. If ye want to stay 'round an' laugh at everybody for the way ye outsmarted 'em, that's yore business. Seems like a feller that can fight so good when he wants to needn't run away from nobody. An' as fur's the dawg's concerned, why, mebbe 'twas a kind of a mercy to kill him quick, 'stead o' lettin' him drag along, miserable like he was. Ye didn't do right, but ye might of done wuss, too, mebbe. An' I reckon ye've learnt a lesson ye won't forgit right away. Now le's be goin'."

Ed crawled to his feet and stood blinking puffy lids.

"An' ye don't figger to keep all o' my money?" he wheezed.

"'Course not. Only what b'longs to me. Ye've got to pay up all round, I tell ye, but what's yourn is yourn, an' I hadn't no intention o' robbin' ye. I jest wanted to make ye fight yer darndest, an' I got all I wanted. Gorry, I ain't had as good a fight sence I was into the army!"

Ed stood silent a minute or two, absently rubbing his swollen jaw. Then he took a long breath, and on his battered visage grew a lumpy grin.

"Wal, I give ye the best I had, an' I'm glad 'twas satisfact'ry," he declared. "I'll go 'long with ye an' eat yer vittles an' sleep into yer bed an' never move till mornin'. Then I'll need some liniment, most likely. Jest the same, I feel a hull lot better, some way. Seems like I'd been a-wanderin' round into the brush an' jest come out onto a ledge where I could see things right. I'm kind o' glad ye happened round here tonight, Job. An' I'm a-goin' to do like ye said—stay right round here an' square up, an' then give 'em all the laff. I outsmarted the hull of 'em. Only trouble was, I kind of outsmarted myself too."

Wobbling a bit, he moved stairward. Job, with the lantern, ascended before him, retrieving money and rifle. Through the kitchen they passed, and out into the yard where the insects scraped away at their unvarying tune. Job blew out the light. Under the twinkling stars the disheveled pair trudged to the road and up the night-bound hill.

"Must be most midnight," conjectured the ghost-layer. "Jest about time for spooks to be a-walkin'."

"I dunno nothin' about no spooks no more," mumbled the ghost. "I'm jest a pore, tired, honest man that wants to git into a real bed. An' my gosh, how I'm a-goin' to sleep!"

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# THE WRECKERS

## *by* LEONARD H. NASON

WRECKERS have long been mysterious awful individuals, villains of many a story of dark deeds on the stormy coasts. Those that still inhabit Cape Cod, however, are a very kindly, sympathetic, genial people, though they have been wreckers for generations.

Among the fraternity of wreckers are different degrees, the principal ones being anchor draggers, beachcombers and copper rollers. The anchor draggers work off shore, in pairs, dragging a line between two boats and, when the line fouls an anchor, a capstan, a pump, a ship's safe, or any other large object jettisoned from some despairing craft, the quarry is buoyed and the anchor draggers go ashore for the necessary tackle to bring their find to the surface.

The beachcombers wait until the ship comes ashore, when they immediately board her and carry off whatever comes to hand, from belaying pins to cabin furniture. The copper rollers, meanwhile, ply their tools along the vessels sides, removing her copper sheathing.

The business of wrecking is not what it once was. There are so many more ways of inland transportation—railroads, trucks and the Cape Cod canal—that the shipping along shore has fallen off sixty per cent. However, the shoals still reach their claw-like arms into the ocean, the offshore currents still chase their tails among the bars, and fog still comes down and blinds the seamen. The advent of steam has also helped to make the business of wrecking one of small profit, but of profit nevertheless. Ships still blunder about in the winter fogs, schooners go to sea poorly manned. A vessel's compass, steam or sail, perhaps, is a bit awry, the currents whisper and swirl alongside, there is a rasp of sand scraping on the hull and, before the startled crew have left their bunks, the sands have their vessel in a grasp that never loosens, a grasp that holds the ten-thousand ton steamer as firmly as the coal barge. The breakers whoop down upon the unfortunate ship, the seas foam beneath her bilge, the combers dash at her like a pack of wolves, she is carried farther and farther into the lair, and her back finally broken across a bar. Then the beachcombers and the copper rollers come down and finish her, and when the sea is calm again, the anchor draggers will be off shore hunting for the anchors so frantically let go, and that were of such little avail.

There is, at the southern end of the Cape, a new house built the past year by one of the more prominent of the wrecking fraternity. The planks are from one ship, the beams and joists from another. The stove is of the shipmate variety, from the galley of the *Maud Ellen*, which went ashore at Nauset last winter. The back porch is the cabin scuttle from the *Mary Palmer*, ashore on Monomoy, and the back steps were her forecastle ladder. The front porch is surrounded by the quarter deck railing from the *Edith and John*, the steps that lead up to it and the house doors are from the *Edith Nute*, a motor barge, and the house furnishings are from a Portuguese steamer that mistook Nauset Light for Minots, and came sliding into the beach to stay until the government blew her up with dynamite.

"The wreckin' business ain't what 'twas," said the owner of this house. "Three-four schooners and a barge or two come ashore last winter. Why, when I was a young man, fust startin' out, we had one on the beach every day, durin' the winter, and sometimes two. But the ottermobiles 'n the canals ruined it."

"And prohibition?"

"Humph!" said he, and winked his glittering eye. "If 'twasn't fer that we'd have shut up shop long ago."

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# The JINX of the WARLOCK

By Fairfax Downey

*Author of "Stand to Horse," "Heads in a Noose," etc.*

CHEEKS flushing, Allan Wight stepped from the tap-room of the "Three Kings" out into the narrow, twisting lane. A gust of laughter and good-natured jeers followed him. He hesitated there, pulling the brim of his cork helmet lower over his direct brown eyes. The summer sun glanced brightly from the whitewashed stone roofs of St. George's Town and glistened again on the clean, shabby white linen suit which covered the young man's sturdy frame.

"Why wouldn't he sit?" came a raucous voice through the tap-room window. "Not keen on standing treat, eh? That's not like a Britisher."

"Strapped was he?" 'some one else suggested.

"A bit, perhaps," was the answer in sonorous tones which carried above the hum of the crowded room and made the eyes of the listener outside soften in recognition. "A trifle strapped," the speaker boomed on, "though why any average Bermudian should be in this golden year of 1863, I really couldn't say, you know."

"Hard luck, I reckon," said a Southern voice.

"You have named it, sir," admitted the deep tones. "Unfortunate investment in your gallant cause, sir, of savings in cargoes of blockade-runners which happened to be blocked. Particularly unfortunate for the lad's mother and sister, but who can blame him? We all play that game."

The face of the listener was twisted in pain. With shoulders slumping, he moved off down the lane. But the next words of his defender pursued him as he left.

"The lad would have sat in for the company, but—" the speaker chuckled loudly—"he's so confoundedly superstitious. He saw he would have made thirteen at the table!"

Allan walked quickly away from the sound of the mirth that followed, sauntering slowly, lost in thought, through the centuries-old streets. White limestone dust rose from his dragging feet and was lost in the sunlight or settled slowly in the shadows cast by towering palm trees. The crimson flowers on a hibiscus bush shook, and two pickaninnies scrambled through, tugging at a protesting goat, but the young man went his way, oblivious. Unconsciously he turned into the street called Featherbed Alley and commenced the climb to his home on Rose Hill.

Why had he been such a fool as to gamble on the cotton brought through by the steamers running the Northern blockade from the Confederate States? Or if he did, why hadn't he risked his money sooner, before the blockade had begun to tighten up and runners captured or driven on the bars at Charleston and Wilmington? He had been very contented in an Admiralty clerkship. Now he had lost that by his neglect and his mother and sister were facing poverty. But the war had transformed all Bermuda from a land of small wealth but pleasant ease into a glittering El Dorado and few



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Bermudans had resisted gambling on the Southern cotton which the English mills demanded so insistently. Small wonder, with a profit on each bale of some fifty pounds sterling.

Cursing his recklessness and his hard luck, Allan trudged up the gentle grade, seeking the shade of a garden wall. A strange, faint sound broke through his pondering as he passed the narrow gateway. It was a piteous, half-human moaning which abruptly ceased, as if choked. Puzzled, Allan paused and peered in. He saw the familiar, tropically luxuriant garden in the rear of the ancient house. An abutment from its stout back wall half masked the gate. To one side of that was a stairway down into the small rooms which had been the slave quarters in the old days. The abutment itself, Allan knew, contained the tank for rain water which is caught on the wrinkled, whitewashed roofs of every house and forms Bermuda's ample but only water supply.

Again came the weird wail, as suddenly cut off. Allan opened the gate and noiselessly entered. The sound seemed to come from the tank.

A wooden door which opened from the garden into the tank stood slightly ajar and a slight splashing was audible. More, however, than could be made by the goldfish sometimes placed in such tanks to keep the water free from mosquitoes.

Allan jerked open the door and stared into the dark interior.

"Who's in there?" he demanded.

Silence. Allan reached for a near-by rake and poised it for a thrust.

"Speak up! Who's there?" he repeated.

His eyes, grown accustomed to the darkness, saw a black head, from which white eyeballs were starting, emerge from the water. Beside it was another head whose eyes gleamed green and whose jaws opened to emit a third moan. The investigator was recoiling when a husky voice announced—

"Nobody's here, suh, but me an' Cheops an' a few yaller fishes."

Allan grinned.

"Come out of that tank," he ordered. "A runaway slave, eh? Well, come out. You're safe on British soil now."

A lanky coal-black negro crawled dripping and shivering from the tank into the garden sunlight, lifting after him a lugubrious looking speckled hound which might be classified as to markings either as white with black spots or black with white spots. That animal proceeded to throw his waterlogged body into a series of the most violent agitations.

"I ain't no slave, suh," the darky declared. "I'se a freed man an' a fust class pilot. Ptolemy Brown de name, suh."

"What were you doing in that tank?"

APPREHENSIVELY the negro looked about him.

"Kin'ly tell me fust, suh, if de steamuh *Diana* is depahted yet," he begged.

"Cleared yesterday," Allan answered.

"Praise de Lawd," the fugitive proclaimed piously. "She carry a mighty heaby-handed cap'n. Me an' Cheops hid away from him."

"What was the trouble?"

"Dat man 'customed to walk backwards. Dat unlucky. Den he git angry when Ptolemy want to rhyme all de rats off de ship. It's bad luck when de rats come ashore demselves. Means you sink. But too many rats aboard's dang'rous. Carry yaller jack, mebbe. It's good luck to git 'em off by a little 'suasion. Ptolemy was rhymin' 'em off when de cap'n hit me."

"How do you rhyme them off," asked Allan, smiling.

"You jes speaks dis." To the accompaniment of cabalistic and grotesque gestures, the black man recited:

"Shoo, rats! 'Bandon ship.
Vittles scanty dis trip.
Better pickin's on de whahves.
Here de crew mos' nearly stahves.
Shoo, rats! De cats is come.
Cap'n he doan leave a crumb."

Allan laughed.

"Sounds like a fine charm, Ptolemy," he said. "Now drain the water out of that tank and don't let me catch you hiding in another. It's just as well the Hamptons who live here were visiting in Hamilton. You're all right now. Your captain's sailed, pilot or no pilot."

"Yes, suh. 'Spec' he thinks he knows de riber hisself. Me an' Cheops thanks you, suh." The negro's cheery call followed the departing Bermudan.

Allan's troubles had begun to weigh on him again when he met a friend from the Admiralty office before his door-step.

"I've been scouring the town for you, old

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chap," he greeted Allan. "Here's some good news for you. I suppose your left palm—or is it your right?—has been itching. Whichever one means money, anyway."

"It really has!" that superstitious young man exclaimed. "Tell me what it is—quick. It means a great deal to me, Ian."

"I know it does, old boy. That's why I came after you the minute I got the word at the Admiralty. Not entirely unselfish, though. I don't want to risk *my* skin. The word is—Salters and Son need a new supercargo for the *Warlock*. Thomson's down with yellow jack. They want some young 'Mudan who's had such training as you have. If your family's willing—"

"They'll have to be, Ian."

"Better trot around there, then, and clinch it."

"I'm off. Thanks ever so much, old chap."

In three minutes Allan was at the office of Salters and Son. It would have been two minutes if a black cat had not crossed in front of him and forced him to make a detour.

Could Mr. Wight fill the responsible position of supercargo, which meant virtual command of the ship, pending the arrival from England of a regular appointee? the manager wanted to know. He could and he would. Let him hold himself in readiness then to take across the *Warlock*, now loading with munitions and medical supplies. Nothing beyond the usual risks, for undertaking which a salary of two hundred pounds a voyage would be allowed. No, nothing risky unless it were the somewhat questionable ability of the Wilmington pilot aboard.

What? Mr. Wight could lay his hands on a very capable Wilmington pilot? Splendid! Let him put to sea tomorrow, Friday, then.

Mr. Wight regretted exceedingly that he could not sail on Friday and he was very certain his pilot entertained similar sentiments. How odd! A personal prejudice against the day as inauspicious for the purpose? So? Very well, let the sailing be postponed a day, since Mr. Wight was the fortunate possessor of a good pilot. They were becoming scarcer, what with the tightening of the blockade and the demand of the Confederate armies for more men.

Thus it was arranged. And that was the intelligence which a much excited young man rushed away with, first to find the lanky North Carolina negro whom he soon discovered near the tank habitat, asleep in the sun with his spotted hound, and then to a little house on Rose Hill.

## II

PTOLEMY BROWN, first class pilot, should have kept clear of the bar of the Ten o' Clubs that night. Failing that, he should have confined himself to the conviviality of companionship of his color, and let no drop of rum pass his ample lips. There were Northern spies abroad in Bermuda, interested in the sailings of blockade-runners. But a man who has spent the better part of two days up to his neck in a tank of cold rain water does feel the need of some slightly thawing fluid, enough at least to hold the "rheumatiz" at bay.

So Ptolemy sat in the bar, regaling himself with a glass or so of punch and enjoying to the utmost the roaring night-life of an erstwhile sleepy little town, become one of the two golden clearing houses for the beleagured Confederacy.

If any spies were present, they got an earful, for Ptolemy, glowing and expanding, boasted considerably to an admiring audience of his prowess as a pilot and of his new berth. Much to his annoyance, however, the limelight was competed for by a habitué of longer standing, a yellow West Indian negro, a servant at Admiralty House and consequently a person of prestige at the Ten o' Clubs.

Ptolemy was launched on a favorite topic.

"I'se nebber widout dese," he declared, displaying a string of at least seven amulets hung about his neck. "You nebber can tell when you's gwan to need 'em. Jes' comin' heah dis ebenin', I sighted a cow on de top of a roof. Brethrun, you all know a cow hadn't ought to be on de top of a roof. Dat's bad luck to glimpse a cow where she hadn't oughter be. I seizes one uv dese tokens an' 'cites a chahm rapid. I hopes de bad luck is 'verted. I—"

"That is just a small matter," interrupted the West Indian negro in faultless English. "Now where I come from, there is real magic and sorcery. I recall—"

"Mistuh—Mistuh—"

"Kinham, Tremont Kinham, at your service."

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"Now Mistuh Kinham, I is considerable versed in cunjurin' maself, an'—"

"What can you know of true voodoo? What—"

Here the company nervously and clamorously interrupted and insisted on a change of the subject. The trend of the conversation, it was the sense of the gathering, was not toward a pleasant, carefree evening. A little music would be far more in order. Would Mr. Kinham oblige on his harmonica? He would indeed.

The portly West Indian rose and drew forth a large harmonica. What little was left unenveloped by his mouth, he cupped over with his hands. Taking a deep breath, he blew three high notes, with chords crashing in after the tremolo. The company sat up with white-toothed grins splitting their black faces and prepared to beat time. But the third accompanying chord never materialized.

The third treble note was followed by an ear-splitting yowl of such mournful intensity that the assemblage leaped to their feet, with graying faces. It had come painfully near that voodoo talk.

A second howl succeeded and from beneath Ptolemy's chair emerged the faithful Cheops. That speckled hound pointed his long muzzle in the approximate direction of the moon and again gave vent to a long, quavering protest, while all present shivered in their shoes.

Kinham excavated the harmonica from his mouth.

"This is positively insulting!" he snorted. "Kick that —— dog out of here!" He moved to suit the action to the word.

"Nobody kicks Cheops 'cept ober my daid body!" interposed the first-class Wilmington pilot. "Harmonicker pains dat houn's ears. Shuah does."

"The worthless cur!" Kinham rasped. "Boot him out or get booted out yourself, nigger!"

"Mistuh Kin-ham!" Ptolemy roared. "You bettuh 'pologize. Me and Cheops is chris'uned foh proud Egypshun monuchs. 'Pologize, yaller man, 'foh I cahves you!"

"I will not, you blighter! I'll give you in charge."

"I'se a freed man and a fust-class pilot. Satuhday I runs de blockade in de *Wahlock* and takes her up de Cape Fear ribber han'some. Me an' Mistuh Wight."

"Think so, do you? Well, I happen to know a boat's coming in from England tomorrow. Probably be a real supercargo aboard. You and your Mister Wight likely will be out of jobs."

With that, Kinham enveloped the harmonica and commenced to sound mightily his highest notes, starting Cheops on a series of his most ill-omened wails.

Ptolemy landed one blow with a ham-like fist and made a hasty exit, Cheops attending.

Within the Ten o' Clubs, friends exhumed from the facial aperture of the spluttering Mr. Kinham one harmonica and three teeth.

## III

THE *Warlock*, riding at anchor in St. George's harbor, was an object of much interest to the town. She was the latest thing over from English shipyards and was as trim a craft as might be. Working against time and aware that the Northern blockade was becoming less and less of an openwork affair, the shipwrights were laying keel after keel in a race with the Federal yards turning out blockaders. And the Englishmen were striving to adapt to conditions—to construct steamers that would combine the maximum of speed and cargo space with the minimum of visibility and water draft. All those conflicting considerations had buzzed in the brains of the designers of the *Warlock* and they had done the best they could with each, but they were in a hurry. Consequently the new blockade runner was a bit of what-is-it.

The interest of the watchers on the wharves changed to surprize when the *Warlock* weighed anchor and proceeded to steam out of the harbor. It was Friday and her sailing date had been specifically moved ahead to Saturday. Now the schedule had been inexplicably shifted back. But the spectators went home with their mystery unsolved as the steamer rounded the harbor mouth, picked her way cautiously through the reefs and faded away in the west in her 690-mile dash.

The supercargo and the Wilmington pilot stood on a small deck space left free by cases of munitions piled high and watched Bermuda melt into nothingness. Vague apprehension was stamped on the face of both alike.

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"I'm not so keen on this Friday sailing," Allan Wight said, half to himself.

"You an' me likewise, Massa Allan," Ptolemy agreed cordially. "Doan bring no good."

"But I'm very grateful to you for your warning, Ptolemy. This is better than no sailing at all. I stood to lose my chance by a delay. I suppose I'm silly about some things—superstitions. And I think you're worse than I am, Ptolemy."

"I says be keerful when you, kin, suh. Now 'bout dat white 'Rabian hoss we got aboard, presint foh a high muck-amuck at Richmon'. Has you spit at him?"

"Why certainly not. What's the matter with you?"

"Oughter do it, suh. 'Verts bad luck."

Allan laughed and left to join Captain Kirksmith on the bridge. But the Arabian horse weighed on his mind. He wished he had not agreed to bring him. Still any service was worth while to the Southern friends whose business was enabling his company to pay seven hundred per cent. dividends. That was why he had brought two crates of chickens. Already food was apt to be scarce in Wilmington; the fowl would be delicacies and would win favor for the new supercargo, favor that would go far toward establishing him in his position. The horse, though, was a worry. A sailor, like almost all Bermudians, Allan added the superstitions of the sea to his already large quota. And sailors often deem four-footed animals ill-luck at sea.

Allan's word was law, not only over the animals and the rest of the cargo but in emergency decisions during the running of the blockade. Salters and Son, like other big English firms, placed the rich cargoes first. Lives? Sailors were paid well to risk them in that game. The ship? Just a carrier, the loss of which was considered inevitable sooner or later. The wise supercargo would defer to the experience of the captain, but authority rested with the former to choose a course, to say whether to run for it or give up, to jettison or feed cotton into the engine fires. Allan was master of the fate of all aboard, ill-omened animals included.

Thus reflecting, the supercargo glanced back and descried his pilot communing lovingly with his speckled hound. His forehead wrinkled with care, he sought the company of his capable captain.

As the voyage wore on, however, the brow of the supercargo began to clear. No Northern cruiser had been so much as sighted. As the *Warlock* under cover of a splendidly black night approached the outer circle of the blockade, Allan's confidence rose with his excitement. Smilingly he watched Captain Kirksmith's minute precautions. The orders given against smoking, the careful relegation of Engineer Brent and his black gang to their cooped-up inferno of an engine room, that no puff or clank might carry across the water and betray them. Repeated warnings of silence to the crew, hardly necessary in view of the fact that capture meant internment of months in a Northern prison and the loss of a golden stream of wages and bonuses. The masking of the binnacle light by a cone which rose to the helmsman's eyes—all these were rules of the perilous game of hide-and-seek to be played, with the premium on stealth, rather than speed.

For the first part of the voyage in the danger zone the *Warlock* ran in luck, skimming the blue surface of the Atlantic without sighting a sail. Allan himself went to the lookout when dusk neared on the last night out and the ship's position was estimated to be near the center of the outer blockade. The black of a moonless night almost had settled down when the supercargo's keen eyes caught the bulk of a large vessel to the starboard, steadily approaching. It could only be a Northern cruiser of heavy armament. His heart pounding, Allan softly called a warning to Captain Kirksmith.

THE captain instantly signaled for the reduced speed which would make the engines quieter.

"She may not see us," he whispered to Allan who had climbed down to the deck. "We'll try and sneak away."

Drawing away, the *Warlock* kept her distance. The cruiser kept her course toward her but gave no sign of having sighted her.

Then another bulk loomed closing in on the port.

The captain stood tense on the bridge pondering whether to call for full speed and make a run for it. Allan waited resolutely, trying to still the trembling of his knees and mentally cursing all Friday sailings. At last the veteran commander decided for

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caution. Without changing speed, he ordered the helmsman to sheer off to the port where the bulk was that of a smaller vessel. Every second was bringing him closer to her. Allan momentarily awaited the crimson flare and crash of a broadside.

But from the port it did not come, although now the *Warlock* must be visible to her adversary on that quarter.

"Take what the gods give," Captain Kirksmith muttered. "We'll risk the little one, so long as the big one doesn't see us."

Then through the silence of the night pierced a long, shrill whinny. The Arabian horse below decks was advertising himself and the *Warlock* disastrously.

"Cut that —— nag's throat," a seaman growled, drawing a long knife and rushing below. With a cry Allan jumped after him. A gun flamed and boomed from the cruiser to the starboard.

"Full speed!" roared Captain Kirksmith down the engine room tube.

Racing, tumbling over cargo, Allan reached the Arabian's stall. There was the faithful Ptolemy, his coat over the horse's head with one hand, a club in the other holding off the angry sailor. The supercargo drew his revolver and herded the man away ahead of him.

Above, shot was whistling across the deck of the *Warlock*, as the big cruiser's broadsides thundered. Marvelously, the smaller vessel to the port still held her fire, though a third gunboat to her port, hitherto unseen, had opened fire. The guns of the blockaders flamed a brighter red. For night had drawn its protecting black curtain over the two smaller ships. Swiftly they slipped away.

Almost alongside, they made their escape together. Across the narrow gap came an unmistakably British voice.

"Hello, there. What ship is that?"

"The *Warlock*, Bermuda," Allan answered.

"This is the *Banshee*, Nassau," was the reply. "I'm Tom Taylor, supercargo. Fooled 'em that time, didn't we. Good luck. See you in Wilmington."

And the *Banshee* vanished in the darkness.

Elated by the escape and his talk with his fellow supercargo, already noted for his successes, Allan Wight clasped hands with his captain. Good luck indeed—after all and in spite of all.

Below Engineer Brent and his black gang were crowding on all the steam the boilers would stand—perhaps more. The race through the rest of the blockade to meet the sunrise at the harbor bar had commenced. It was a rendezvous with little leeway—be too early and you lacked the high water which would carry you over the bar; too late, and broad daylight put you at the mercy of the gunboats which formed the inner ring of the blockade.

The paddle-floats of the *Warlock* drove her on steadily and her engines beat valiantly, if sometimes eccentrically. Ptolemy was in charge now and he and the captain stood by the wheel. It could be seen that the lanky black man was somewhat puffed with his importance, but there was an air of dependability about him, too, as he peered into the darkness. Occasionally he sniffed for the smell of the land, and his large ears wiggled as if he were pricking them forward to catch the sound of the breakers. Concealed beneath a tarpaulin near him crouched the faithful and inseparable Cheops.

"A soundin', Cap'n, please suh," the pilot requested. The engines were stopped and the report passed back.

"Right, suh, dead ahead, suh," said Ptolemy grinning.

Allan began to breathe easier. He seemed to have picked his pilot well, and they would come through safely. So much depended on it at home. They had left the jinx astern he thought, though Brent, the engineer, had courted trouble below a minute ago by passing him a drink of water through a ladder.

In the blackness which precedes the dawn, Ptolemy called for another sounding. The boom of the breakers was plain now.

"Close off Smith's Islund, I'se knowed it, man an' boy," the darkey announced jubilantly. "Point starboard, suh, and daid slow. Ready to run across de bah, sho'tly."

In the east the skies were graying with dawn. The moment for steaming through the channel to safety under the guns of Fort Fisher was close at hand. Tingling with excitement, Allan made out the blurred shapes of three Northern gunboats still unaware of the proximity of the low-lying blockade runner stealing past them.

Then for the second time that night came sounds that betrayed them—several of them. Every rooster in the two crates of chickens destined for the delectation of

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Wilmington dinner tables began to herald the dawn in clarion tones.

How those roosters crowed! They crowed until their necks, along with those of the innocent hens, were thoroughly wrung. But it was too late. All three gunboats steamed headlong for the *Warlock*, peppering her from every gun that could be brought to bear. Shells whistled in flocks across her bows.

"Run for it, Captain!" Allan yelled, and the *Warlock* fairly leaped toward the channel mouth, Ptolemy bent over the wheel, with his woolly head almost disappearing between his shoulders.

*Bang! Crash! Bang!* Two shells exploded over the deck. The blockade-runner had lost those few minutes of grace which would have meant immunity from the gunboats. Other shells flung jets of spray across her, but on she forged. Allan watched the fast-approaching gunboats in helpless despair.

As the *Warlock* trembled from the impact of a well-aimed shell, from shoreward came screaming and whirring answering rounds from the batteries of Fort Fisher. Colonel Lamb and his gunners, saviors of many a blockade runner, had come into action. Sullenly, the gunboats, balked of their prey, steamed off out of range. The *Warlock* was saved.

## IV

SUPERCARGO and pilot confronted each other on the dock at Wilmington. The face of the white man was an angry red from his expostulations. The black man stood before him patiently, but his lips were thrust out in stubborn determination. Their argument had reached a deadlock. Allan Wight spoke out in a last effort.

"I say, Ptolemy, look here," he urged as persuasively as he could. "You're a free man and I know you can do as you please. But can't you see the point? It's something that carries weight with you and me. Other people would laugh at it, though I'm not sure they would after what happened last voyage. There's a jinx on the ship and it almost sunk her and you know very well what it is."

"I doan'—"

"Confound you, you do know! I've told you ten times. There's an animal jinx on the *Warlock*. They're the worst luck in the world at sea and that horse proved it. Those chickens were worse. They may have only two legs but they're land fowl and have no business at sea. I won't have another animal aboard. There's too much at stake."

"I asks you, Massa Allan, did Cheops open his mouf. No suh. Not a bahk. No—"

"He may not have barked this time, but that's no assurance he won't the next. One yip from him and we're done for. Somebody'll step on his tail."

"No suh. Cheops tail am mighty sho't."

"Well, his feet then. They're big enough." And Allan glared down at the bone of contention which gazed back at him with limpid eyes, and plainly grinned.

Allan looked away and swore fervently. But Ptolemy regarded the spotted hound fondly and delivered his ultimatum.

"Ptolemy an' Cheops nebber parts. Cheops, he's good luck an' a fren' foh life. Ptolemy 'steems you high, Massa Allan. He craves to wuhk foh you an' de big money. But he nebber desuhts dat dawg uv his'n."

Followed demonstrations of loyalty, during which Allan reflected. It was certain that Wilmington pilots were a scarce article. The supercargo felt confident of the competence of the sable individual he had found in the Bermuda water tank. He had made excellent disposition of the *Warlock's* cargo to the Confederates. Now she waited loaded to the rails with Sea Island cotton, ready for her run back. A successful return with that valuable consignment would probably make his reputation and establish him in the risky but most remunerative career of blockade-runner. Could he afford to lose his ship, allow an incompetent to run it on the bar at the outset of the voyage, to be pounded to pieces by guns and waves?

With a superstitious shudder, the young man made his decision.

"All right, Ptolemy. We'll ship Cheops. But if he ever barks—"

"I vouches foh him, suh. Rest easy, suh."

Thus manned—and dogged—the *Warlock* sailed. And she ran the blockade as if none existed. The few ships that were sighted were none of them near enough to cause concern. Cheers and congratulations greeted her arrival in St. George's

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harbor. The joy of Allan's mother and sister and the solid appreciation of the firm of Salters and Son were not more marked than the air of honor vindicated assumed by the Wilmington pilot on landing. His speckled hound followed at his heels with a demeanor no less cocky and jaunty.

This pair was not long in reaching the Ten o' Clubs and their entrance was a triumphant one. Its dusky denizens acclaimed a talented pilot of their race, with money in his pocket. And not in vain. The open-handed Mr. Brown magnanimously bade all be of good cheer and furnished the wherewithal. Mugs began to clink and darkey voices rose in rich harmony. The sympathies of the company were divided between North and South. Not many months ago Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation making the black men of the Great Land to the West free like their British brethren. But it was the cotton and the war needs of the Confederacy which had brought to Bermuda its prosperity with its corollary of the present evening's jollity. Let all differences be-buried, then, and the health drunk of a first class pilot and, since one health must follow another, that of his faithful hound, Cheops.

A song was halted in mid course by a deep-throated growl from the canine toast. Cheops knew an enemy when he saw one. The hair rose on his neck. He assumed an attitude of defense, verging on one of offense. Mr. Tremont Kinham, employee of the Admiralty and harmonica player extraordinary, had entered.

"Down Cheops, down," the master of revels commanded. "Welcome, Brothuh Tremont, welcome. No hard feelin's jes' so dere's no moh harmonicker puffo'-mance."

"Welcome ——!" replied Brother Tremont ungraciously.

"Fohgive an' fohgit," urged Brother Brown.

"Forgive and forget, my eye!" Brother Tremont snarled back.

"Fohgive and fohgit yoh teeth," Brother Brown amended neatly.

Through the aperture referred to, the West Indian spluttered a string of inarticulate curses.

"Abracadabra forward and backward and up and down," he thundered. "I see a watery grave for you and that —— dog. I see a prison cell. I see gallows tree, I see a cold and moldering grave!"

Warmed though it was, the blood of his auditors ran cold. Eyes starting white from their sockets, they sat frozen to their benches. The unaffected Cheops, however, saved the situation by a belligerent dash which caused Brother Tremont to cut short an only partially exhausted repertoire of curses and seek the night air in great haste. Slowly the spirits of the company recovered.

BEFORE the *Warlock* cleared for her second run, Ptolemy going aboard met his enemy coming ashore. A black look on the yellow visage of the Admiralty messenger was his only greeting.

"He put a cuhse on us all, Cheops," the pilot informed his companion. "But I thinks it's a feebil one, 'cause he's dat kin' uv a pusson."

That estimate seemed a just one. The Northern cruisers which sometimes hovered not far from the Bermuda reefs were absent. The first and second lines of the blockade were successfully eluded, and the swift little *Warlock* paddled along at a leisurely eight knots somewhat to the disappointment of Engineer Brent who swore he could get at least twelve out of her—better, if an emergency forced some of the deck cargo to be jetisonned. Allan groaned at that and laughingly told the engineer he would arrange a race in neutral waters for him sometime. Until then, let him display a little fellow-feeling for the responsibilities of a supercargo.

"Right you are," the engineer grinned. "But if you ever are needing it, Mr. Wight, depend on it I'll give you a head of steam that'll burst the boilers before we're caught."

The blackness of the last night left nothing to be desired. Reckonings showed that a timely arrival at the bar might be counted upon. Captain Kirksmith had picked the holes through the blockading fleet with rare good fortune. But to Allan, standing forward with the watchful Ptolemy, the luck seemed to be holding *too* good.

"This makes my second run without a hitch," he meditated. "Too smooth, too smooth. I suppose that sooner or later we'll be snapped up and have to spend some time interned, but I want so badly to make good

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first. I'm afraid this can't last, though. It would be almost a relief to be shot at a bit."

A similar unrest seemed to be felt by the first class pilot. His lanky form flitted nervously about from wheel to lookout to bow. Finally he could not resist communicating his fears.

"Massa Allan, Ptolemy he sniffs cunjur in de air," he whispered. "Yaller man done put a cuhse on him. Bes' cite a chahm, suh. 'Cite yoh strongist chahm, Massa Allan."

"Tush, Ptolemy. I don't know any," the supercargo answered.

"Den Ptolemy ask yoh permission to 'cite one."

Allan grinned sheepishly and looked about him.

"Won't do any harm," he murmured. "Go ahead."

At that the darkey squatted on his haunches, crossed his arms across his chest and grasped his ears and intoned in a dismal, hollow voice:

"Pizen insides in de pot
Wid de sarpints steamin' hot.
Add de hin' laigs uv a toad
Hoppin' on a ha'nted road.
Wuhms an' bats an' lizuhds stir
An' a piece uv 'possum fur.
Little bit of el'phunt's nose
An' a witch's middle toes.
Bubble, bubble, trouble brof.
Skeer de ebil speerits off."

Allan choked an almost irresistible impulse to laugh, which might have betrayed them to a blockader. How had this illiterate North Carolina negro learned such a garbled hodge-podge version of the witch's charm from "Macbeth?" But Ptolemy, deadly serious, rose and went up to his piloting infinitely comforted.

Not five minutes later, when it yet lacked half an hour of sunrise, he and Allan simultaneously sighted a Northern gunboat lying directly across their course through Smith's Inlet. In an instant they had hissed their warning back to Captain Kirksmith.

"Stop her," the captain signaled, and the engines shut down without a tell-tale steam blast.

"Come about, suh, quick," the pilot whispered, "If we rounds Cape Feah, I brings you through de New Inlet. Mus' make time, suh. Sunrise near an' it's shuah pow'ful close sailin'."

Allan ran below to the engine-room at a look from the captain.

"Now's your chance, Mr. Brent," he told the sweating, red-faced engineer. "It's up to your engines now. As soon as we sneak away from our hopeful friend dead ahead, we're going to run for the other inlet as fast as the pilot can take us. It's the speed you've been promising us, or a Northern prison."

The red face was wreathed in a beatific smile. Without a word, Brent turned savagely on his black gang who gave a subdued cheer and commenced to feed coal for dear life.

Having seen, but not been seen, the *Warlock* stole away from the patroling gunboat. Her paddle-floats began to churn the water faster and faster.

Ten knots—eleven, twelve—and the East fading from black to gray.

Thirteen knots! And then a second gunboat on guard over the New Inlet loomed to starboard.

Would she sight them in that gray haze? It seemed she must, she lay so close. But she gave no sign—a sleepy lookout perhaps. Would he drowse the few minutes longer which were all they needed to slip through the inlet to safety? Dull gray had not yet lighted to pink.

The crazy cadence of the hard-driven engines increased and Brent for the first time stared nervously at the mounting pressure gauge.

Then softly but sibilantly like a giant hissing very low, the *Warlock* began to blow off steam through her safety valves. And as she blew, sounded the shrill and unmistakable notes of a harmonica. Searching frantically through the cloud of steam, Brent located the noise. A section of a harmonica had been cleverly fitted into a safety valve, and the escaping steam was playing it! Only in an emergency with high steam up would the infernal instrument have blown. Brent dug at it with his knife, but in vain.

Muzzle pointed aloft, Cheops was protesting the indignity to his ears with long-drawn, plaintive howls. They would have raised the dead. They certainly raised the gunners of the blockader.

*Bang! Splash!* A shot across the bows.

Aboard the *Warlock*, the speckled hound was being pursued by several seamen with murderous intent, Cheops' master stood by the wheel, wringing his ham-like hands, tears pouring down his ebony cheeks.

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"Oh, dat villun Brothuh Tremont! Dat skunk Kinham!" he wailed, as the pursuit of Cheops took its obstacle-race course over and between the cases on the deck.

"Stand by, Captain," Allan ordered. "They've got us. They can blow us out of the water at that range."

"Right," Kirksmith answered. "No chance to run now."

A boat of blue-jackets, a lieutenant in the stern, was pulling across from the gunboat. In a few minutes it was alongside and the lieutenant clambered over the rail, followed by his men.

"Got you this time, Johnny Bull!" the young Northern officer called, as he swung a leg over.

But the chase of Cheops had directed that harassed hound to that very point. And in that faithful pet's bosom was aroused some deep-seated animosity to blue-clad legs hardly less than his aversion to the harmonica. His yelps suddenly altered to the most ferocious growls. Teeth bared, he went for that offending leg.

With a yell of pain, the lieutenant threw himself back into his men. The lot went tumbling down in a heap into the bottom of their boat.

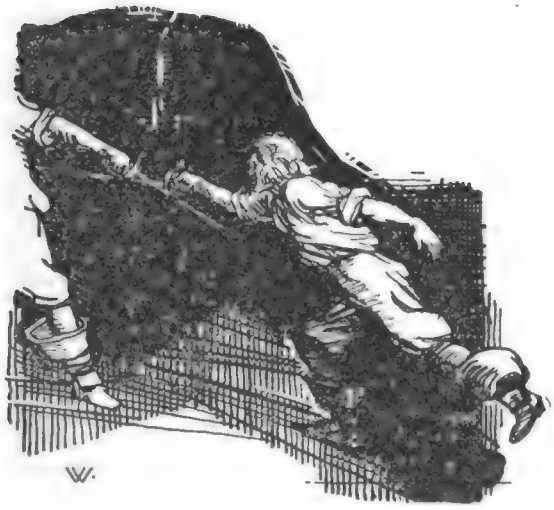
"Full steam ahead!" Allan shouted down the tube.

Forward plunged the *Warlock*. The few minutes the gunboat held her fire were enough. With shells whining overhead, the runner surged across the bar and away up the inlet, her fires roaring and steam fairly rocking her boilers. After all, there are jinxes and jinxes.

Steam blew through the safety valve again, and again sounded the notes of the enclosed harmonica. But the valiant Cheops crouched quiescent by his master at the helm.

"Why doesn't he howl now?" Allan called back from the bow.

"Dat's playin' de only tune Cheops like," rejoiced the grinning Ptolemy busy at his first-class piloting. "Ain't it so? Doan you hear it, suh?—'I Wish I Was in Dixie!' "



# RODOMONT

## A Three-Part Story . . . Part Two

by H. Bedford Jones

*Author of "South, West and North," "Brown Kurneval," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.***

ROGER DOMONT, nicknamed Rodomont, a released prisoner from France, wanted keenly to get back to America. So did St. Martin, a Canadian, whom he met by chance on the road. They joined in partnership.

Luck soon came to them in the form of an emaciated old Armenian who, exhausted, asked them to take a letter to his master, the Nameless Exile, imprisoned in the royal prison of Mont St. Michel. Upon closing the agreement, he gave them gold and a valuable jewel.

The ways of the road were varied. Baron De Lussan made things uncomfortable for them, with insults and jeers; Elsie de Bebambough, also *en route* to the Mont, came as a shining light of color to Domont; and finally Roger d'Aumont, a wastrel, a

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good fellow, and a disgrace to his family name, crossed their path.

They met at an inn where d'Aumont was preparing a drinking bout with the host. As soon as the two Rogers met, each was startled by their minute likeness to the other. Domont made it known that his parents came from France, from the original d'Aumont family and that he was the young nobleman's cousin. He explained that his parents had changed the French name to Domont to conform with American customs.

D'Aumont, in turn, confided that he was also on the way to the Mont with a letter to the prior, and that he wished to be disinherited so that he could seek adventure in Canada. A mutual bond was formed, and a wassail ensued. Their good fellowship resulted in Domont offering to take d'Aumont's letter to the prior.

During the drinking a group of cavaliers arrived outside the inn door and, failing to gain admittance, called out—

"Open, rats, open!"

D'Aumont flew into a rage on the insult, but was quelled. The cavaliers entered and made known that their mission was to find the murderer of two cavaliers of the guards.

Not recognizing St. Martin as the culprit, they immediately took leave. No sooner were they out of the inn than d'Aumont's anger returned, and in order to be rid of the cavaliers and a fight St. Martin knocked d'Aumont to the floor senseless.

In the morning d'Aumont was still in a coma, and the two travelers took up their journey again to the Mont, Domont in the clothes of d'Aumont. St. Martin marveled at the likeness between the cousins, and declared that even their closest friends could not tell them apart.

They had no sooner started than two more adventures befell them. Mistaking Domont for d'Aumont, the Baron De Lussan compelled him to fight a duel. Domont fought gladly and sorely wounded the baron.

At the next inn they encountered Elsie again. Her female traveling companion, a spy, had tried to rob her of the letter she was carrying to the Nameless Exile on the Mont.

Acting quickly, Domont gained the girl's confidence and was given the letter for safe keeping.

Out on the road again, the travelers met the Mole, a friar at Mont St. Michel. Being a clever, learned old man, the Mole learned the true story of Domont's disguise and purpose, over which he laughed heartily. Together they traveled to the Mont.

Dom Julien Doyte, the Superior, or prior of the royal prison of exile was a kindly old man. He received the supposed d'Aumont like a son.

Tearing open the letter with quavering fingers he read it aloud in part:

"—we order and command that you receive in your abode Sieur Roger d'Aumont, and keep him there until new orders come from us."

Domont then knew why the Mole had laughed.

## CHAPTER V

### AN EXILE IS NOT ALWAYS A CAPTIVE

DOMONT was bowed out by the prior and handed over to the graces of Brother Simon, a fat and rosy-cheeked friar, before he had at all recovered from his shock of consternation. Now he saw everything—why those two officers had intercepted d'Aumont, knowing that their duel might never be settled otherwise; why the real d'Aumont had been in so reckless a mood; worst of all, why the Mole had burst into such uproarious laughter. A man bearing a *lettre de cachet* and not knowing it!

Tempted to speak, Domont held silence with grim restraint. A word from him, the other papers which he carried, would prove his real identity. Upon that, there would be all manner of lengthy and judicial inquiries, and his chance of delivering the letter to the Nameless Exile would be tremendously jeopardized, if not lost altogether.

Domont was stubbornly resolved to deliver that letter at all costs, not so much because of the payment received, as by reason of his promise to the brave little Armenian. Moreover, it was an extremely serious matter to juggle with the direct orders of the king, and exposure in this affair would undoubtedly prove of the gravest peril not only to Domont himself, but also to Roger d'Aumont. For the moment, he must hold his peace, and let circumstances dictate to him.

Brother Simon was, on the surface, a jolly soul, and grinned familiarly at Domont as he jingled his bunch of huge keys.

"Welcome to our royal hostelry, Sieur d'Aumont!" he exclaimed, as he led the American from the reception chamber. "We were advised yesterday of your imminent arrival, and you have caused us much anxiety of spirit. More, in fact, than we have known for years. I swear it upon the bone of the blessed St. Maur, the friend of St. Benoit, which now reposes in our treasury!"

"I am to be congratulated upon my importance," said Domont drily. "And how have I caused this disturbance, Brother Simon?"

"Well, consider. Go more slowly, I pray you! We have this staircase to mount, and I am not exactly slender, despite fasting." The fat brother winked greasily. "Here is seven hundred livres a year come to visit us, and where are we to put it, where, I ask?

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The old dungeons beneath the west platform are extremely unhealthy, and would put our seven hundred livres in grave peril. The cells of the royal exiles, such as are empty, are in shocking disrepair. And our seven hundred livres would certainly complain to the king. There is always the wooden cage, but that is only to be used on express royal orders, and you, monsieur, are not a prisoner but an exile, an excellently-paying quest! Name of St. Maur, what are we to do?"

"Precisely the thing in which I am most interested," commented Domont. "What, then, have you done?"

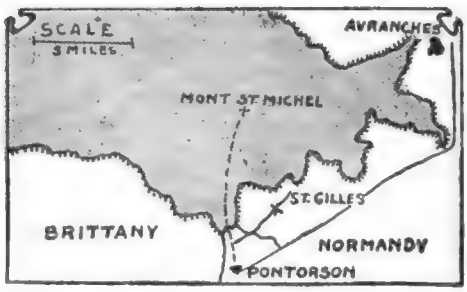
"We have given you an excellent chamber, one of our very best. A trifle in the air, perhaps, being *au quatrieme*, but with an admirable view of those beloved shores from which you are temporarily exiled. Through this door, monsieur, past the guard chamber and straight on into the little court, right! There is the Perrine Tower. We mount by this outside staircase, if you please."

The Perrine Tower! That name wakened Domont sharply like a shock of cold water. He realized that on the third floor of this tower, in the room below his own, was the prisoner of mystery, the Nameless Exile. The thought fetched him on the alert, brought him from his dull mechanical acceptance of everything.

This tower, built in the fourteenth century by Abbot Pierre le Roy, was composed of six superimposed chambers. An outside stairway from the court served the first four floors from the inside, then passed above the adjoining walls to the outside, where it acted as a parapet for the defense of the great stairs descending from the abbatial building to the terraces below. All Mont St. Michel, indeed, was built as much for defense as for utility.

As they passed the entrance of the third chamber, Domont glanced at it. Unlike the others, it was locked hard and fast. He remembered that the Nameless Exile was never allowed to emerge from that cell. The door was massive, iron-bound, impregnable as the gaunt gray walls around. Then he found himself at his own doorway which the fat monk opened.

"*Voilà*, M. d'Aumont!" exclaimed Brother Simon grandly. "This is one of best rooms. The exposure, as you will see, is to the south. Down the hillside behind the abbey are the grand and lesser exiles, the buildings occupied by less fortunate mortals. I distinctly draw your attention to the comparison, in view of what Dom Julien will presently say to you. So you




came across the sands with our Mole, eh? A droll one, the little Mole! Somewhat amiss in his head, and said to be suspected of dealing in the black arts. But one never knows. Alas, poor creature! He will come to no good end, I fear."

Domont looked sharply at his companion. Behind that jovial exterior, behind those twinkling little eyes, for an instant he discerned a something that was malignant and terrible. Then it passed, and he gave the glimpse no more heed.

"And now," pursued Brother Simon, "if you will excuse me, I shall get on my way to perform other errands. Dom Julien will visit you in a few moments for the usual instruction. Good day, monsieur, and a pleasant visit to you."

The fat brother departed, leaving the door ajar.

Domont inspected his new quarters. The room was surprizingly large and comfortable, the barred window alone presenting any semblance of a prison cell. There was an excellent bed in one corner, in another a chair and table. The furnishings of the room were completed by a commode, a wardrobe and some dishes. From the window was a magnificent view of the Norman and Breton coast, far outspread in the morning sunlight.

Sinking into his chair, Domont tried to face the overwhelming situation with some degree of common sense. He comprehended that as a paying guest, his lot was far from being that of a madman or a strictly royal prisoner. He was, in effect, an exile and little more. However, since the prior was coming to visit him shortly, he must reach some decision at once. To speak or not to

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speak? Confession might be perilous, yet the risk of being exposed later on was of a certainty more perilous.

"Plague take it, I've d'Aumont to think of!" reflected the American with sudden hope. "When he shows up, will be time enough to speak. Beyond a doubt, too, Roger d'Aumont is not the man to let another rot in his place. He's not to blame for this. He was drunk as a lord and could not remember the import of that letter. When he recovers and learns what has happened, he'll come here hotfoot to set me free at any cost. No wonder the Mole laughed! It's enough to make me laugh myself."

Laugh he did, and he was still chuckling when the tall figure of the Maurist prior, in his black garb, filled the doorway.

Dom Julien bowed and accepted the chair which Domont offered him. His eyes were twinkling as he surveyed his paying guest, and he seemed in anything but a severe humor.

"Well, M. d'Aumont," he began genially, "I have received a letter regarding you from his grace the Bishop of Avranches, and I have also talked with our librarian, the Mole, who guided you across from Pontorson this morning. It appears that your offenses are not particularly heavy, and that you will be at liberty to depart whenever you address a certain letter to M. le Baron, your worthy father. Eh?"

"That letter," said Domont with an affectation of stiffness that concealed an exact truth, "I shall never write."

"Then we shall enjoy the pleasure of your company for a long time," and the prior laughed. "Come, I mean the words, my dear d'Aumont! It is a real pleasure to receive a guest who is neither a family disgrace nor an absolute madman, and whom we may treat as a gentleman. I trust sincerely that the triple fugue you played with the sword this morning will not bring orders to treat you with greater severity."

"So do I," rejoined the American, and smiled. "You have heard of that affair, then?"

"I hear of everything," said Dom Julien seriously. "It is my duty, however, to acquaint you with our rules, which in your case are not too strict. In the first place, I am in absolute charge of Mont St. Michel. I, and I alone, lodge you, punish you, hear any complaints after morning mass and give such liberty as seems best. If I am absent or ill, these duties devolve on the sub-prior, but never upon others. Baron de Karque himself has nothing to do with my charges. On Sundays and feast days you are obliged, as a good Catholic, to assist at mass."

Domont was not a good Catholic at all, but his cousin undoubtedly was, so he said nothing but bent his head in assent. The prior continued to rattle off rules and regulations, but presently abandoned his usual form of speech, drew forth a document which bore his seal and tapped it in a leisurely fashion with one finger.

"At this season the doors are unlocked at six in the morning and locked at seven in the evening. No lights are allowed. Any letters to or from M. le Baron, your father, or M. de Pontchartrain, the minister, go sealed. All others must be read by me. Now, monsieur, I desire to show you every consideration, as I believe you are worthy of it. Here is a *billet*—" and he extended the document—"which is good until revoked by me, giving you permission to circulate at will during the day, either within the abbey itself or in the town below. If you desire to hunt in the preserves of the abbatial fiefs along the coast, that also can be arranged."

Domont could not repress a movement of astonishment as he took the document.

"But this is not imprisonment, it is hospitality!" he exclaimed, marveling. "Are your guests always treated in this fashion?"

"When they deserve such treatment, yes. We have at present two or three gentlemen, but they do not all enjoy such liberty. If you desire to have your meals served in company with them or to play at cards or to receive visitors here, you may do so. Monsieur, have you any arms, other than the sword at your side?"

"None," said Domont.

Dom Julien gave him an attentive regard for a long moment, then deliberately and gravely winked.

"In a few minutes," he said, "I shall send two of the brethren. They will take charge of your sword, also of any papers or money that you have upon your person. Your word will, of course, be sufficient that your pockets contain nothing. After which you will be free to amuse yourself as you like. So, monsieur, for the present I bid you good day."

With this the prior took his departure.

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Domont had not missed the significance of his wink and his last speech. After bowing him out, he emptied his pockets of everything, and put the papers and money in the bottom of an empty water jug. Then he sat down.

If he had been stupefied to discover that he was a royal exile, he was even more astounded to discover the manner of this exile. He had heard of Mont St. Michel as a place worse than the Bastile itself, with which it was equally famous or rather infamous as a cruel and rigorous prison. He had heard of its dungeon, the Trappe, gained only by a narrow entrance barely sufficient to give passage to one man, and of its barbarous wooden cage fashioned by order of Louis XI, of its eternally wet prison cells, and this chamber of his was immeasurably far from such dire reality! In winter, however, the whole place must be anything but comfortable.

Reflection now swiftly showed him that, if he owed his misfortune to Roger d'Aumont, he also owed that distant cousin much to counterbalance this misfortune. A gentleman and a great noble was not to be treated like some insane scapegrace, arrested and haled to a dungeon. His imprisonment was an affair handled according to his quality. In this case, it amounted to no more than exile from family and court and usual surroundings. A man so detained might escape at cost of attainting his name and honor. He might even reach England or Flanders and live out his life. A man so detained, however, did not have any life imprisonment to anticipate, and such an escape would be bought at too bitter a price. After all, the system was extremely logical, and from the highly important financial point of view, it was also quite sensible. The prisoner or his family paid.

DOMONT chuckled at this thought.

"After all, why worry? I'll send St. Martin to find d'Aumont and keep him quiet for a day or two until I get that letter delivered. Then d'Aumont can show up here, explain the imposture as a dodge to save his honor and show his hurt head in proof that he was unable to come sooner. All will go well. Afterward, d'Aumont can either stay here until he makes peace with his family, or else he can escape and go to Canada with us if he likes. Decidedly, it was wise to keep my mouth shut! Things are not so bad. I'll have two or three days of this and then be off to St. Malo."

It was in an extremely cheerful frame of mind that he received two black-clad brethren who relieved him of his sword. They then accepted his word that he had not so much as a scrap of paper or a sol on his person, and departed. Domont sauntered after them, promptly lost his way below in the twisting maze of the abbey, and presently gained the outer terraces by showing his permit to the guards. He wondered how he was going to deliver that letter to the Nameless Exile.

Leaving the black mouth of the Chatelet and gaining the battlemented terraces and the bright sunlight, he stood gazing out across the glistening yellow leagues of sand which stretched around the mount, north and south, for miles. To an ignorant eye, escape from this slenderly guarded place looked ridiculously easy. Nearly two miles to the north, yet apparently only a stone's throw distant, was the long rock of Tombelaine, stronghold of the English during the Hundred Years' War, whence the mount had twice endured long sieges.

To the east ran the coast of Normandy, and to the south, that of Brittany, both easy of access at low tide. Yet across these same sands came sudden fogs and without warning, so that here and there men would sink abruptly and be swallowed up. Also, the tide crept in with insidious speed, sometimes with a rushing wave of water. Those sands, now dotted by the moving figures of cockle hunters, had buried the secret of more than one escaped prisoner as they had buried many a joyous but incautious pilgrim.

"Ha, Rodomont! Said I not that this was an ill trail to follow?"

Domont turned and saw St. Martin coming down the stairs toward him, looking anything but happy. He knew at once that the Canadian had learned of his predicament.

"You've heard, then?" he asked.

St. Martin nodded gloomily.

"Aye; your medicine is weak, comrade. I am to lunch with the prior in an hour, and relate to him the state of the missions in Canada. Shall I tell him that this is all a mistake and—"

"Not at all, not at all!" exclaimed Domont hurriedly. "Keep your mouth shut

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about me! Nothing could be better, I assure you!"

"Eh?" The other stared blankly. "Nothing could be better? When you are doomed to this pinnacle of rock for the ——knows how long?"

Domont explained the nature of his imprisonment. While he was making St. Martin comprehend the situation, the grotesque figure of the Mole made its appearance, climbing toward them from the town below. The Mole came up, panting and grinning amiably.

"Ho, friends, you should hear Baron de Karque mouth the rolling German oaths!" he cried jubilantly. "Hot words are passing down there. It wants little, but he and de Lussan will have swords out presently! By the way, friend d'Aumont, he is going to bid you to dinner with him tonight. How like you our hostelry?"

"It is admirable." Domont met the sparkling brown eyes and chuckled. "No wonder you laughed this morning, —— take you! I had to laugh myself when I thought about it. But pardon me one moment."

He turned to St. Martin and spoke rapidly in English.

"Listen! I will find a way to deliver the Armenian's letter. Meanwhile, I must depend on you. Get away from here sometime today or tonight, ride back to that tavern and find that cousin of mine. Keep him from coming here for a few days, say three days, until I have time to deliver the letter. Then he can show himself and straighten out the tangle. We can then go on to St. Malo. You understand?"

St. Martin nodded, comprehending the situation readily enough, and his face cleared. But now the Mole plucked at Domont's sleeve, and his over-large face was stamped with a look of diabolical cunning.

"Hark, my friend!" he exclaimed softly. "I do not speak English, it is true, but you should have more caution. Certain words are alike in both tongues."

"Eh!" exclaimed Domont. "What words, then?"

"Why, for example, the word Armenian and the word letter."

Domont started. For a long moment he met the brilliant eyes of this singular creature, and upon him swept a wave of startled doubt and dismay. St. Martin dropped hand to knife, and cursed softly. Perceiving the disconcerting impression his words had created, the Mole clapped his hands and chortled.

"Ho, ho! The Mole can guess something of your errand here, my friend, and so much the better! You need have no fear of me. Are we not comrades and allies? Long live the devil! Without him, where would all honest monks be and where would the poor Mole be? Now play well your part, M. d'Aumont, for you'll have need of finesse!"

"So will you, I think," said Domont. "Brother Simon tells me you are suspected of dealing in the black arts."

Then Domont was indeed startled. The little deformed man took a step backward. The grin upon his lips died into a grimace of freezing horror, and his face became ghastly white. With an effort, he collected himself, and spoke soberly.

"My friend, I owe you thanks for that word." He paused, wet his lips and laid a trembling hand on Domont's arm. "One word! Don't forget that you met Baron de Karque last year in Cologne, where he drank you under the table. Farewell! I must be off to my work. *Pax vobiscum—non sum dignus, non sum dignus.*"

With his absurd burst of parrot-like chatter, he darted away and was gone up the stairs toward the Chatelet. St. Martin glowered after him.

"Foul fiend fly away with the creature! That fellow is shrewd! He is like the *jongleurs* of the Mohawks, and as unfathomably dangerous. Look at his legs! All these folks here have ankles like trees, and have need of such muscles if they climb about this mount daily. So I am to ride off tonight, eh?"

"If you agree," assented Domont, frowning, over the words and air of the Mole."

Oh, I agree to anything," returned the other, and shrugged lightly. "I'll do it, then. Three days will serve you, eh?"

"It should be enough. Come, walk down a little toward town, and I'll point out my prison window."

"And do your talking now," grumbled St. Martin. "They've warned me that in the refectory and elsewhere in the abbey proper I'm not to speak a word. There's a rule of silence. I'll have to think up some lie to get out of the accursed place tonight."

To get any view of the Perrine tower was not easy, however. They descended the terraces as far as the parish church of St. Peter, which stood above the buildings of

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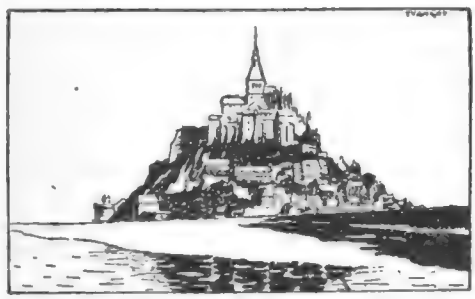
the town, and then as they studied the place from below, Domont gripped his companion's arm abruptly.

"Solved! You note that each of the rooms in that tower has but the one central window? Now I'll procure a light, thin, strong line, and the rest is easy. I'll have



only to tie the packet to it, attach a weight and lower it to the window of the chamber below me, where the Nameless Exile is confined. The thing is simple, after all!"

St. Martin grunted.

"Simple things are usually the most difficult, when you come to do them. Hold, what in Satan's name is that! Look!"

A dolorous creaking and groaning drew their attention and, rising from below toward the high platform of the abbey, they perceived a great load of faggots. This was the hoist of the abbey, a huge wheel worked by prisoners, which drew up from below the provisions and materials that came to the place.

The two stood watching this until a passing monk informed them that it was nearly time for the noonday meal, and together they turned back into the soaring pile of rock and made their way aloft to the abbey. Save for inquiries as to direction, they were as silent as the black-clad figures about them, for St. Martin was in a mood of gloomy oppression, and Domont was still somewhat uneasy over the shrewdness of the Mole.

It was difficult to be certain of that creature's professed friendliness, although Domont was strongly inclined to believe in it. None the less, to go upon instinct were little less than folly in such case, and he could not but worry. These feelings, however, were soon lost in sheer amazement at the place around when the two friends reached the refectory.

This huge thirteenth century hall on the second floor of the Marvel was lighted by large windows at each end, and on the side by fifty-seven lancet bays, all rich with carving and softly radiant with the most exquisite of stained glass. In the south wall was the reader's pulpit, and doorways led to the kitchens and the almonry. Henry II of England had sat at meat in this hall, and many another monarch after him, and that lofty vaulting had more than once reverberated to the clash of knightly steel. But never had it echoed to the sound of human voices, save from the droning reader in the pulpit.

The company which now assembled here was almost as remarkable as the place itself. Domont and St. Martin were silently assigned places near the prior, and a dozen monks filed in. Then entered the more important guests from the pilgrim's hostel that adjoined the church, the poorer folk being fed in the almonry. Of these guests, a few were Germans, that nation sending many pilgrims to the mount each year, but the greater number were French and Flemish, either rich tradesmen or of the petty *noblesse*. All wore the standard pilgrim garb with a green cockade, a blue bandolier and white, sheepskin gloves. Last of all entered Comte de Lussan, left arm hanging stiffly but with concealed bandage. He gave Domont and the Canadian a grave bow, and took the seat awaiting him beside the prior.

EXCEPT for the reader who occupied the high lectern, there was absolute silence during the meal, which was anything but cheerful. Domont tried to imagine the real Roger d'Aumont condemned to such a daily routine, and smiled at the thought. The pilgrims were repressed, fearful, or mildly ecstatic. The monks, very cream of the Benedictine cream, were dour and pallid men, all of them great students or chroniclers. Brother Simon alone did not bear out the reputation of the order for austere learning, and this rubicund friar appeared singularly out of place in such a gathering.

As soon as the meal was over and grace said, Dom Julien beckoned St. Martin, who took his departure with the prior to a place where speech was not barred. The entire throng, indeed, were eager for release from constraint, and Domont followed one of the gesturing groups into the magnificent cloister, proclaimed as the most beautiful

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architectural monument of all France. Passing through this, he came at length to the great platform outside the church where most of the pilgrims were assembled in vociferous converse. Awed by the marvelous view which here greeted him, with all the east and south coasts outstretched for miles, and beyond them the green depths of Brittany even to Mount Dol, blue in the distance, Domont was standing by the parapet when he was aware of a figure approaching him. He turned to see de Lussan, who bowed slightly.

"Monsieur," said the count in a grave voice, "I trust you do not consider our quarrel settled by this trifling pin-prick in the arm?"

Despite the quiet air and voice, Domont was startled by the gusty passion of fury that looked out at him from those dark eyes. He had thought his affair with de Lussan ended, but with such a man, it could have only one ending.

"Why not?" he demanded coolly.

"What has passed between us, monsieur, cannot be settled in so light a fashion," said de Lussan with *hauteur*. "This scratch does not trouble me in the least, let alone disabling me. I await your answer, monsieur."

Domont shrugged.

"As you like. Though I do not perceive how I am to carry on any quarrel under present circumstances."

"That can be arranged."

"Very well. When do you wish me to kill you, and with what weapons?"

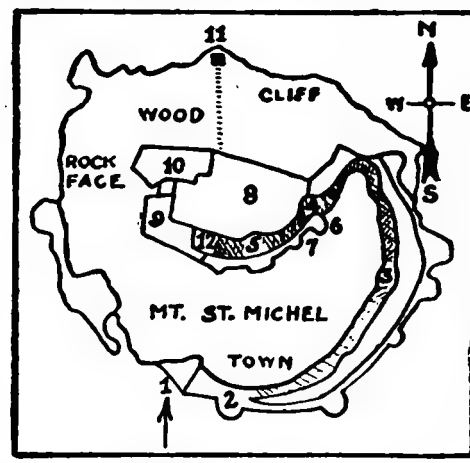
De Lussan whitened at this, but retained his self-control.

"If you will request permission to hunt on the Norman coast with Baron de Karque, the third day from now, the affair will prove itself. I have already spoken with the baron, and the prior will interpose no obstacle. The weapons will be swords, if that suits you."

"Very well, monsieur."

De Lussan bowed again and departed, fingering a snuff-box. Domont gazed frowningly after that lithe, handsome figure, and knew that in this man he had now a deadly enemy. Three days, eh? Well, if he had to kill de Lussan, so be it. And much might happen in two or three days. By that time, indeed, he might manage to deliver his letter to the Nameless Exile. And who was this mysterious prisoner? The query tugged suddenly at his brain, wakened his dormant curiosity to a vivid and compelling interest.

An Armenian came from the direction of Paris, hunted down, harried by all the king's men, and gladly paid with a diamond worth a thousand livres for the delivery of a letter. A girl coming from London brought another




1. BARBICAN & SOUTHGATE. 2. KING'S GATE & TOWER. 3. STREET LEADING TO ABBEY. 4. CHATELET. 5. GREAT INNER DEGREE. 6. PERRINE TOWER. 7. ABBATIAL BUILDING. 8. CHURCH. 9. WEST PLATFORM. 10. GARDEN. 11. FOUNT OF ST. AUBERT. 12. SOUTH PLATFORM.

letter from the woman who virtually ruled England. These two letters for a man immured in the Perrine Tower and held incommunicate, a man whose very name was unknown! Who was this man, that he should be of international importance? What had been his crime that he should be thus buried alive from the world and lost to the sight of men?

A touch at his arm, and Domont turned to find the Mole standing beside him.

"My friend, I have a letter for you. Dom Julien has read and requested me to deliver it. Come into the scriptorium. It is the recreation hour, and we may steal a word in peace without penalties. *Silentium per duas dies*, grr-r-r!"

The Mole shambled away, and Domont followed the deformed man, wondering.

## CHAPTER VI

### SAUCE FOR THE GANDER IS SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE

THE scriptorium of the abbey, situated directly beneath that wondrous cloister, had not always been a room of silent labor over manuscripts and books. It was a



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tall and splendid hall of four naves, divided by heavy columns, and was well lighted by curious Moorish windows. Here, under the banners of great houses and famous men, Louis XI had in 1469 instituted the order of St. Michel, and here, since that day, the knights of the order had held their assemblies. But now banners and knighthood were one in dim dust, and, like the high abbatial dignity of the Mont itself over which the slumber of kings and popes had been keenly disturbed in times past, that famous order was now only a toy decoration to be granted some royal favorite or wagered across a gaming table, and the two tremendous fireplaces warmed only tonsured men who wielded brush and pen at the tables and drawing racks, their sandals waking shuffling echoes from the roof that had once rung to the sharp clang of du Guesclin's battered armor.

The Mole dropped swiftly into a chair, and drew manuscript and ink-horn before him as though at work. He spoke with his low, musical chuckle ringing accompaniment to the words, as he threw out an unsealed paper on the table.

"Read, read! Oh, here is a pretty game, my friend! Read, for time lacks."

Domont opened the paper and puzzled out the awkwardly written words. He was bidden to dine with Baron de Karque de Bebambourg that evening, an early meal at six, since he must be back in his prison ere vespers were finished. He was to come as much before the hour as suited him.

"What's all the mystery about?" he demanded, perplexed by the portentous and chuckling air of the little man.

"Mystery?" The Mole peered up at him keenly. "By St. Michel, there's more mystery than either you or I know as yet. And neither of us can afford to hang back from the other. I love you, Rodomont! I have scented your business, and your head hangs looser than you know, but I saw friendliness in your eye this morning, and you are a proper man, a man such as I might have been had my mother borne me aright. And we are friends. Do you know, Rodomont, I have never had a friend? Well, I shall go to Canada or America with you, if you'll have such a poor creature at your heels."

The abrupt pathos of this appeal startled Domont inexpressibly. The passionate words poured out with a rush, borne upon a flood of emotion. Those liquid brown eyes upturned to him were suffused by a pitiable depth of feeling. The musical cadence of that voice drove straight to his heart. The Mole's large hands were gripping the manuscript before him, gripping it hard. Domont put down his hand and touched those hot fingers.

"Friend!" he said gently. "Yes, there's much in the word, more in the act and more yet in the thought itself, my Mole! Only men who've experienced much can know this. Yes, little man of the mighty spirit, I'll give you my friendship and more, if you'll have it. And go to Canada with me you shall, if that's your wish. Body of me, what a heart there's in you! Not for all to see, either, though you've shown it to me."

"Because you could see it, Rodomont. Few can," came the answer. Then the Mole's mood changed abruptly. "Listen! We can't talk here. I'll come to you tonight. So you dine with the baron, eh? And you hunt with him on the third day. Hunt, in this hot summer season!" A laugh bubbled from the man's lips. "Well, there'll be blood of that hunting."

Domont stared at him in blank amazement.

"—— take you! How do you know so much about things?"

"I know so much?" came the sardonic response. "Why, like Dom Julien, I know everything. But I know more than he does. Look out for yourself down in the town there, my friend. The devil's brewing a hot kettle, I can tell you. Who is the man you should most fear up here, eh? Come, inform me!"

"Why," said Domont slowly, meeting those keenly laughing eyes. "I suppose the prior."

"He? Oh-ho! Look to yourself day and night, Rodomont, but take no thought to poor Dom Julien. Nay, turn your eyes to fat Brother Simon!"

Domont's brows drew down.

"The fat brother, that merry soul? Hm! I did notice something malignant in his eye. But why fear him?"

"Why fear the hawk, quoth the pigeon! Oh, Simon plays his part, too, plays it very subtly indeed. Who's he but a chief spy for M. de Pontchartrain, to watch our prior and our prisoners and the conduct of things here? And Simon has his own spies down below in the town. One of them, a

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wry-necked rogue, serves Baron de Karque. Hm! I had rather be the Mole who serves than the great abbot who is served!"

"Spies, eh?"

Domont was startled. Although he realized that this might have been expected, none the less it was something of a shock.

"Spies, in this sacred place?"

"Sacred rat hole!" ejaculated the Mole with acerbity. "You know the reason very well. That man enclosed in the third chamber of the Perrine tower. Why, I heard de Lussan tell the prior that half of Christendom would go flittering if that man were loosed or if it were even known that he was here!"

"Well, it is known," said Domont impatiently. "Who is he, then?"

The brown eyes widened at him.

"Eh? You know not? You, who bear a letter to him?"

"Nonsense. I met a poor wounded Armenian on the road, saved his life, undertook to deliver the letter for him, that's all."

The Mole started to his feet, staring incredulously. He read the truth in Domont's eyes, and let his long arms fall in a gesture of helplessness. A grin swam into that overlarge face of his, only to be suddenly stifled.

"Rodomont, Rodomont, what a —— of a jest! You and your letters! But behind the jest is tragedy, and I can't laugh at that. Tragedy, no less! And you are my friend. Well, I know that man's name and, I think, his nationality. But who he is, I haven't the least idea. Hold, my friend, no impatience! I shan't tell you his name; I doubt if six people in France know it, and certainly Dom Julien himself does not know it. I'm the only person to speak with him alone since he came here last winter, and yet neither of us can understand what the other says."

Domont frowned in dismayed perplexity at this patchwork of riddles, yet he was aware of the earnestness in the Mole's voice.

"I think you're telling me the truth, but I can't make head or tail of it," he said at length.

The little man laughed.

"Neither can I, and it's equal! Now let me guide you. Go down and talk with the pretty demoiselle in the baron's garden. Ask her something! Ask her to show you the handsome snuffbox she brought as a present to the baron."

"For the love of the saints, speak openly!" demanded Domont irritably.

"Not I. The Mole works in the dark, my friend. He watches people's eyes and their looks tell him more than their words, and he has the ability to draw his own conclusions. Careful now. Here is that —— cat-footed rogue."

The Mole seized quill and bent over the manuscript. Domont, watching him at work, was aware of Brother Simon entering the great room. How he noted that this fat and jovial monk moved about with singular lightness, and that his sharp eyes stabbed everywhere. Simon nodded to him and he returned the nod. Then, moving away, the American sought the open air of the west platform once more.

Here was mystery piled upon mystery. How much the Mole actually knew, how much was sheer guesswork, it was impossible for Domont to tell. He could be certain only of the man's friendship, and of this he was now very sure. A shrewd creature, well named indeed, this singular little Mole! The fellow obviously had a natural facility for probing into the secrets of those around him and making conjectures from a careless word or look; though his remarks anent the Nameless Exile were not to be explained, and only added to that growing and determined mystery. This talk of spies, however, was sufficient to warn the American that he was treading in perilous places.

After a time he made his way back to his own prison room, and there found not only his few personal belongings, fetched up from the barbican gate, but also a large bundle of garments which had evidently been sent from home for the use of Roger d'Aumont. With much relief, Domont abandoned the gold-laced officer's coat, shaved, washed himself and dressed anew in clean linen, then got into a suit of rich but plain plum-velvet and enjoyed a pipe in safe solitude.

LATER in the afternoon he left the abbey and descended to the terraces and ramparts below, strolling down past the town church and the booths where innumerable *béatilles*, small objects such as rosaries and medals and shells, were sold to the pilgrims. Here, as he watched the visitors and townfolk, he was aware of St. Martin swinging down the narrow street, so Domont went

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on until he came to a walk passing to the ramparts, where he stepped aside. St. Martin followed, looking very much pleased with himself.

"All lies told, and well told," said the Canadian, "I go back to seek a good horse that I left foundered at that inn. I'll make use of our friend d'Aumont's horse, now at Pontorson. Dom Julien has given me a blessed rosary to deliver there, too, and I've another errand for that fat Brother Simon. As soon as the tide's out tonight, I'll be off. I should sleep with your worthy cousin later in the night, if I ride hard."

"Good. Hold! What's your errand for fat Simon?"

"Why, I'm to dine at that Pontorson inn where we breakfasted and met de Lussan. I'm to tell the host that he was short by a barrel in the flour sent over today."

Domont frowned.

"No road belts?"

St. Martin displayed a tiny brass heart tipped with a flame, a small brother to the many and splendid ex-votif gifts in the same shape, tendered St. Michel by pilgrims.

"For the innkeeper's daughter. It may signify who sent me, I know not."

Domont nodded thoughtfully.

"Brother Simon is a spy here. You're carrying messages for the enemy, and so much the better, I suppose. Now, the third afternoon from this, I'm to ride with the baron over on the mainland, and meet de Lussan again. A killing game this time. It seems that the fool isn't satisfied."

"Oh, that's news! Where does the meeting take place?"

Domont shrugged.

"Not settled yet, apparently. It's bad medicine for us all, though. I'll have to deliver the letter and then be prepared to run, after killing de Lussan. If possible, be at Pontorson that day and meet us when we come from here."

"Agreed."

"Since you're in no haste to be off, suppose you look about and buy me a thin line and some sort of weight, as I might be watched. I'll be at the King's Gate, where Baron de Karque is stopping. Pay your respects to him, and give me the purchases."

St. Martin chuckled and assented. As the two men strolled along the ramparts toward the lower town, it was arranged that St. Martin had best dispose of the diamond in Avranches, before going to meet d'Aumont, and secure the money without delay. Much hung upon the swing of chance. To make plans at this stage of the game was impossible, but it would be best to have as much cash in hand as possible.

Twenty minutes later Domont was announced to the commendatory abbot of Mont St. Michel. Baron de Karque, as his long string of titles was usually curtailed, was a brusk, burly man of thirty-odd, very richly dressed and immensely wigged. His eyes were heavy and protruding, and he was plainly none too quick of wit, although he belonged to a celebrated line of Rhenish diplomats. Perhaps the abbatial dignity had been bestowed upon him in order to keep him out of mischief, thought Domont, for certainly he was an assertive and positive person. His cordial greeting, however, was unassumed and very eager, and he insisted on shaking Domont's hand repeatedly.

"I owe you much," he said impressively. "I have heard the story from my niece, and also from de Lussan. If you do not kill him later, I shall do so myself. Ah, the dog, the swine!"

Not being aware just what the worthy baron had heard, Domont held his peace and listened to hearty German oaths, for de Karque was a simple sort of man, something of a glutton in food and drink and was given to expressing himself with violence and without tact. There was a little black-clad man in attendance, who held his head somewhat to one side, and Domont recalled the Mole's warning about a wry-necked spy. He was glad enough when the baron conducted him to a window and showed him a tiny garden space below, just inside the rampart wall.

"Karl will lead you there, my friend. Will you excuse me for a little while? I must scrutinize a report that goes off tonight to His Majesty, and I'm a —— poor hand at reading these monkish scrawls. Elisa is waiting to receive you and thank you herself for your kindness. Then we shall dine, and what a dinner! A sturgeon, a rare fish nowadays. Well, well, get along with you and be thanked by prettier lips than mine. Karl! Conduct this gentleman to the garden and announce his presence to my niece. And, d'Aumont, you remember our last meeting in Cologne? Well, I have secured some of that excellent Maine wine you like so much."

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"And this time," said Domont, laughing, "we'll see who slides under the board first, eh? With all my heart, I assure you!"

The garden was a tiny place, a little nook crouched beneath the ramparts, to which a stone stair-flight led. The entrance from the tower was cloaked by a heavy growth of bushes which still further decreased the garden space. It was quiet here, deeply secluded and private, the lichen-covered walls rising high all around, a niche entirely out of the world. Thrust into the earth of a tiny flower bed, as if left to mark some order, was a long walking stick, ivory-handled.

Finding himself alone while the baron's niece was being summoned, Domont pulled out the stick, inspected it curiously and saw a crest cut in the ivory handle. It was, no doubt, a possession of the baron's that had been left here.

"Good afternoon, M. d'Aumont!"

At the English words Domont whirled, stick in hand, and then bowed. Coming toward him was the girl, hand outstretched, and he lifted the slim fingers to his lips. She was very beautiful, now wearing dove-gray satin with lace high about her throat, evidently to conceal the injury there. Her unpowdered yellow hair hung in heavy masses about her head, and her deep blue eyes, much darker than his own, struck out at Domont frankly and unafraid. Those eyes of hers were very clear and were lighted by a joyous eagerness, so that Domont was a trifle startled when he met their piercing quality. He perceived instantly that this woman was perfectly mistress of herself, and he sensed rare depths in her. All his conception of her as a light and careless-hearted girl, was dissipated like smoke on the wind in that moment.

"I regret that I do not speak your charming language, mademoiselle," he returned quietly and then caught a slight widening of her eyes.

So she understood French, after all!

Domont cut her short.

"You perceive this stick?" he said, laughing a little. "It is an excellent thing, and very well balanced. Regard, now, how it swings to the hand."

He held it out like a rapier. Then, swift as light, he thrust with it into the depths of the bushes before him, drove home the thrust hard. There was a choked cry of agony. Out into the open path plunged a man, pitifully stammering, holding his bleeding mouth, dancing frantically under the cruelty of that thrust which had hammered his teeth and ripped his lips. Domont put the stick into his hand.

"Take that to M. le Baron. When you have business again in those bushes, make sure the garden is unoccupied. Go!"

"But, monsieur! We are alone here!"

The wry-necked fellow departed, groaning. Domont turned to the wide-eyed girl and quietly addressed her in English.

"Your pardon," he said. "That fellow is a spy, and I thought best to get rid of him. I saw him slip in among those bushes. I am not supposed to know English, you apprehend? Well, I trust that you are not inconvenienced by your injury of this morning?"

"It is only a scratch, thank you," she murmured, still staring at him. "I do thank you for your great help there at the inn, with all my heart. But now—this! I did not dream there could be other spies."

"There are many here, it appears," said Domont. "This man was a spy upon your uncle, not upon you."

"Tell me, monsieur," she asked quietly. "Are you really the Sieur d'Aumont?"

Domont smiled. He gave her his true name, and briefly explained his distant connection with the real d'Aumont, although saying nothing of his errand here. Inwardly, he was wondering why this woman professed ignorance of French. Woman indeed? Girl, rather. He guessed that she was not more that three-and-twenty. Suddenly she started, turned to him with swiftly anxious gaze.

"Monsieur, my letter! Give it back to me, please. The danger is over now."

"Unfortunately," said Domont, "I promised you that I would either deliver that letter or destroy it. I have kept my promise."

"Oh!" The word broke from her as she realized the import of his words, and she faced him in a blaze of impetuous anger. Besides the anger, however, her eyes held alarm and quick fear. "You—how dare you, how dare you destroy it, when I trusted you! That letter meant everything!"

Domont's gaze hardened a little.

"I do not like these involved trails," he said abruptly. "Listen to me if you please! There are certain things which I should like very much to understand. You

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are the niece of a German nobleman. You are an English girl with a French or Rhenish name, pretending to speak no French when in reality you understand it perfectly. You professed this morning to be carrying that letter quite innocently. Now it appears otherwise to me. Instead of coming to meet your uncle in Germany, you come here to an out-of-the way corner of France. My dear young lady, I am quite willing to be frank with you as regards myself, but I think that you are far from exhibiting frankness to me. You will not regret it, I assure you, if you will trust me. Do you know, I am rather curious to inspect that snuff box which you brought as a gift to your uncle?"

While Domont spoke, the girl had watched him with startled gaze, a little flush coming into her cheeks. Then, at his last words, she turned pale as death.

"How—how do you know—about that?" she uttered in a low voice.

"So simply as to appear incredible," returned Domont coolly. He resolved to make good his boast of frankness. "I have made friends, that is all, and by making friends, have turned acute danger into profit. One of these friends is a queer little distorted man who is called the Mole."

"Oh! That half-witted creature who was with my uncle today."

She broke off abruptly, clenched her hands at her breast. Terror flooded into her eyes, and wild consternation.

"Then he was a spy. You too are a spy! And I have failed."

"I am not a spy." Domont glanced around and lowered his tone. "If you want the exact truth, I am here for the same reason you seem to be here, to deliver a letter. Yours, coming from England, would involve you if discovered. To save you, I destroyed it. Mine, if delivered, can do you no harm."

DOUBT and alarm struggled in her face, and then she drew a long breath.

"This is true? Yes, I see it is true. Oh, you are a man, a man, and it is all so different for a man!" she exclaimed passionately. Then a sudden smile touched her lips. "And it is not hard to see why you make friends. Please forgive all I said. I have been tormented. You can not imagine what it has meant to me! With the destruction of that letter, I have failed absolutely and beyond repair. I was doomed from the start. That spying woman must have suspected the truth."

"What truth, then?" asked Domont, as she paused.

"It was not the letter alone that she wanted. It was to kill me!" A rush of confession burst from the girl. "Somehow, she had guessed all the truth. The real Elsie de Bebambourg was detained in London. Her uncle had not seen her for fifteen years, she spoke only English and German. I could impersonate her without danger."

A sharp exclamation broke from Domont. He was astounded at this information.

"If you are not Elise. Then who are you?"

"Mary Suffolk. My father is dead. I have had a post at court—"

She broke off. Domont thought that he read the thought in her mind, and a little laugh came from his lips.

"You undertook to deliver this letter to gain money, eh?"

"You are cynical, sir!"

He bowed gravely.

"My dear lady, I honor you for the fact. I am sincere. No one would undertake court intrigue and spy work for patriotic motives. That is a pretty fiction. It is very different in the field of action, in military service, in behalf of some great and definite cause! You, obviously, are not a spy by profession."

"Thank you, sir, you are very gracious!" she said, and Domont saw that she was angered by his words. "I am no spy. I merely undertook to deliver a letter."

"It amounts to the same thing. This petty letter delivery makes no great appeal. It is undertaken for love of man for master —" and here Domont thought of that poor Armenian on the highway— "or for direct payment, or because the person concerned is fitted for no better work. Evidently, in your case, it is for direct payment."

"And in your case?" she exclaimed.

"For exactly the same reason," he said, and her eyes widened suddenly. "Now, I'll tell you my story another time. Just at present we had better stick to the affair in hand, for we may not have long to speak English together. First, please to understand that I am entirely at your service, in any way possible. I think you may have need of me."

Her lip trembled slightly. "I—I think

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so too," she said unexpectedly. "And I thank heaven for you, even if you have destroyed my letter! I was to deliver it and get a reply. Now I have failed. Within a few days there is to be a boat awaiting me at St. Malo, supposedly a Dutch lugger. I was to get aboard her, somehow, anyhow."

Domont's eyes brightened. Admiration leaped in him for the brave heart of this girl who had undertaken a task too full of peril for most men. He felt swift regret that he had destroyed her letter and with it all her weary labor of danger.

"Do you know the name of this prisoner who is called the Nameless Exile?"

"No," she said quietly. "Do you?"

"The secret, it appears, is not entrusted to ordinary mortals. However, I hope to learn everything shortly. And don't be too sure you have failed. If I can deliver a letter, I can also receive one. This prisoner may confide to me a letter which will serve Her Grace of Marlborough. If I can do this, then I shall ask for passage aboard your lugger, for I think that ere another fortnight I shall have dire need of it!"

"Good!" She held out her hand to him, and her dark blue eyes were like stars. "Then we are friends."

"With all my heart." said Domont.

As he met her shining gaze, he once more saw a faint tide of color creep into her cheeks

Now interruption broke upon them, sharp and imperative. Baron de Karque came striding into the garden with St. Martin following. He addressed his supposed niece in German, presented St. Martin, and the latter bowed above her hand. Then the Canadian turned to Domont and explained that he was leaving, but might return later to the Mont.

"I have brought you a slight remembrance," he pursued gravely, but with a roguish twinkle in his eye as he produced a small packet. "It is a rosary and reliquary, containing a portion of the cloak which St. Martin shared with the beggar, which I beg that you will accept in memory of our acquaintance. When I return to the Mont, I shall see you again."

Domont thanked him soberly, slipped the packet into his coat pocket, and St. Martin departed with the baron.

"He is one of your friends, eh?" said the girl softly. "He seemed to find that reliquary very amusing for some reason."

Domont chuckled.

"Aye. St. Martin knows everything. That is the means whereby I hope to deliver my letter."

"Oh! But here is the baron."

De Karque rejoined them, looking rather red in the face, and with his wig awry.

"—— take it" he ejaculated. "M. d'Aumont, now you are in trouble for striking that man. He has made a complaint to the superior, and I have been asked to send you up to the abbey at once."

Domont shrugged.

"The fellow is a spy set upon you. Do not trouble yourself about it."

"Well, spies are necessary," said the baron philosophically. "These accursed blackrobes guard their prisoners well, I can tell you! Any act of violence brings swift punishment."

"Then, I shall depart."

"Death of my life!" roared the baron in sudden furious outburst. "You are my guest. I have told the prior he may go to the ——. Am I one of his scoundrelly dogs to take his orders? I, the abbott of this place? Thunders of heaven, we shall see whose orders are most regarded! You will return when we have dined and not before."

"In that case, let us forget the entire matter," said Domont, and the baron was at once mollified.

"Good!" he declared jovially. "Eat, drink and be merry, and the fiend take the morrow! But come, we are having an early dinner for your benefit, my friend, and I think it is about ready. I am always ready to eat, and this excellent sturgeon draws me strangely, I can assure you. A beautiful fish!"

The pursy baron produced a large snuff-box of gold and tortoise-shell, proffered it to his guest, who refused it, and inhaled largely. Then, with complacent mien, he displayed the box.

"A gift from Elise, bless her heart!" he declared. "Very pretty, is it not?"

Domont shot a glance at the girl, who made smiling response, and examined the box. He found it in no way unusual, and, without having fathomed the mystery, returned it to the baron with a few words of due praise.

The three entered the tower and ascended to the apartments occupied by the baron. The early meal was served in an ancient, oak-paneled room. Darkness would not

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fall until nearly ten at night, but none the less the baron had ordered two large candelabra lighted. He was earnestly desirous of manifesting his gratitude for Domont's action of the morning in protecting his niece, and showed it most clearly.

Not a little to his dismay, when the meal was over and the girl had left them, Domont discovered that his host had no intention of rejoining Elise. Instead, a dozen bottles of Maine wine were produced, and Baron de Karque settled resolutely down with song and story to drink his guest under the table. Domont found himself forced do play the part of his distant cousin, and, having to do it, he did it well.

"You've heard about the prisoner up yonder?" demanded the baron, at the fifth bottle.

"Which one?" Domont laughed. "My own case, I confess, is of most interest to me."

"Bah! You'll be out of here in a few weeks, I understand. No, I mean the man guarded night and day, confined like a felon, allowed no communication, the one they usually call the Nameless Exile."

"I know little about him. Who is he, then?"

"Hm! Wish I knew," grumbled the baron, by this time red in the face but still stout of head. "He's a person of tremendous importance, by the fuss they make. I hear he was brought here last November under a strong guard, but his name did not figure on the order. He came from Marseilles. Some say he is a prince of the blood, but I know the court too well for that story to go down; it is of course possible that he is the Man in the Iron Mask—"

"It may be rather a dangerous matter to waste vain speculation on," said Domont drily, to which the baron nodded assent. "It's much safer to discuss our ride three days hence. I think de Lussan spoke to you about it?"

"Aye. What a ——'s dog he is! Look out for that man. Saturday we ride hunting, though you may be confined for striking this hangdog servant of mine."

"In which case—"

"De Lussan will see to it that you are allowed to go, never fear. He means to kill you."

"But I mean to kill him," said Domont quietly.

The baron broke into laughter at this, then sobered suddenly.

"He mentioned you had pinked him the other morning—when the —— was it? Yesterday or this morning? No matter. He had drunk too much at the moment; was fresh from his morning draught. Look out for him next time. I am to be your second with your permission."

"I shall be honored, I assure you."

"Just one thing. You are to go on parole. Understand? I've taught these cursed monks that I have some right in my own abbey, even if this is the second time I have ever visited it. You go in my care. Therefore you will give me your word to return here with me."

This was a stiff and unexpected blow, but Domont saw there was no help for it.

"Very well. I give it," he said quietly. "Another bottle?"

"By all means."

Twenty minutes later, the good baron was talking thickly, and so was Domont, but the latter had kept a fairly clear head and was biding his time. Presently this came, while the baron was relating some curious incidents of a three-cornered duel in which he had once participated at Cologne.

Domont, under cover of this relation, quietly picked up the snuffbox lying on the table, and fell to examining it. To any casual scrutiny, the box was merely a handsome toy of gold and shell, and being half filled with brown tobacco dust, betrayed nothing unusual. Nor could Domont discover anything about it which tended to solve the mystery, until he idly put his finger into the snuff. Then, in a flash, he had the answer to his puzzle. There was a false bottom to the box.

For a moment he was tempted by the wine that had mounted to his head. Why not carry off the little box, inspect it thoroughly, and find just what was in the false bottom? Then swift shame reddened his cheeks at thought of such treachery to Mary Suffolk; angry at himself for having drunk so deeply, he came to his feet and insisted on departing at once, to which the baron was forced to assent.

He saw the girl again, for an instant only, bowed over her hand and sought the tower gate with the worthy baron accompanying him on unsteady feet. As they parted at the gate, de Karque seized his arm and hiccuped a last admonition.

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"A—a word in your ear, friend d'Aumont! These monks are the ——. If an exile shows any surliness, they are prone to call him a madman and treat him so. Be affable, then! Be affable, and the world is yours! Good night. Health and long life to you, Sieur d'Aumont! I shall have good horses for us to ride on the Saturday."

Domont went on up the hill, and was considerably sobered by the time he reached the Chatelet and was ordered to follow a guard to the quarters of the prior. He was still more sober when he had received a stern lecture from Dom Julien regarding his conduct, and was asked if he had any excuse for his action in striking the man.

"I am not accustomed to be spied upon," he said stiffly, in the manner of Roger d'Aumont.

"Then," retorted the prior, "you will be confined to your own chamber for two days, in order that you may reflect upon such things. Next time you are tempted to strike blows, my dear M. d'Aumont, you will stop and consider. I bid you good night."

Domont fell asleep, however, reflecting not upon such things, but upon the blue eyes of Mary Suffolk.

## CHAPTER VII

### ONE DEVIL AND TEN

SO IT came about that Roger Domont spent the following two days in the solitude of his chamber, seeing only fat Brother Simon three times each day when his meals arrived. During this while, however, there was no lack of activity beneath the placid surface of life at the sacred mount.

Wealthy pilgrims lodged at inns, occasionally in the Abbey, while poor folk were guested in the abbey hostelry. But it did not become the rank of Count de Lussan nor the dignity of the king's deputy to accept either alternative. Instead, he was installed in the guest chamber of the abbatial buildings, close to the dwelling of the prior.

His room was very grand, but it was also large and drafty, and showed signs of its age. Some part of the old paneling was hidden by blackened and outworn tapestries, the carven beams were dark with the smoke of many hundreds of winters, and the huge bed, almost entirely enclosed by paneling and hangings, was a perfect fortress of privacy.

Across the eight-foot fireplace, quite unused during the summer season, was hung another ancient tapestry whose decoration showed the arms of Lorraine, thanks to a previous commendatory abbot who had been a duke of that ilk. This tapestry, despite its weight, was never still. The draft down the huge chimney kept it in a continual stir, so that it was always lightly waving, and one tattered corner of it in particular seemed on a perpetual devil's dance.

Darkness somewhat banished the gauntness of the old chamber, but increased its air of mystery, for there was little wherewith to dispel the darkness. On a table in the center of the room was a great silver candelabrum in which flickered eight candles, and at this table sat de Lussan, just finishing a letter. He sanded it carefully, reread it, then folded it and applied hot wax fresh from a candle flame. Into this wax he set the carven face of a signet ring from his finger, first licking the stone. He appeared quite recovered from his wound, which had not been of any moment.

There was a knock at the door. De Lussan called a careless order to enter, then leaned forward and addressed his letter with imposing flourishes. The door swung open to admit the figure of fat Brother Simon, huge and sinister in its black garb. De Lussan laid aside his completed missive, glanced up at the intruder and then sat back in his chair. He tasted with critical air a cup of wine that stood at his elbow and then spoke.

"Well?"

Brother Simon closed the door and then came forward, his sandals flapping on the floor and a grin widening on his lips.

"Dom Julien will be pleased to receive you in ten minutes, monsieur, if that suits your pleasure. He wishes speech with you regarding the letter which came today from M. de Pontchartrain."

"The contents of that letter?"

"I have not yet had an opportunity of perusing it."

De Lussan nodded comprehension. His manner toward this fat monk was a singular compound of his usual insolent hauteur and a certain tolerance, as if he found Brother Simon rather amusing to his taste and somewhat worthy of his confidence. He touched the letter he had just written.

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"I am sending a good report of you, Simon."

"Thank you, monsieur. I shall endeavor to justify it."

"You yourself asked speech with me this evening. Well?"

"Perhaps you prefer to see Dom Julien first."

"Bah! Let the prior wait. What is he to me? Speak."

Brother Simon chuckled, for there were few men who dared so speak of the prior of Mont St. Michel, and he did not love Dom Julien.

"There are a number of small matters, monsieur, that I desired to bring to your attention. First, as regards the injury done to Karl by this Sieur d'Aumont."

De Lussan made a brusk gesture of dismissal.

"The penalty for clumsiness. Take warning. Besides," he added with a slight smile, "within a few more days there will be no need of punishing M. d'Aumont."

Simon shrugged.

"Very well, monsieur. Next, the Canadian gentleman of whom you spoke to me has departed on some errand regarding a horse. He returns in a few days. I sent by his hand a letter to the inn-keeper at Pontorson."

"By his hand?" De Lussan looked up sharply, but the monk smiled.

"Inside a votive heart of brass. It is safe, and the usual method of communicating. This Canadian, when he returns to Pontorson, will be drugged and searched. He will then be turned over to the *charité* as a vagabond. Thus, he will be detained until you can satisfy yourself about him."

De Lussan nodded with an air of satisfaction, and stared reflectively at the monk.

"Well arranged. I have heard that in Canada they kill people by throwing knives and axes after the custom of the savages, and this man wears a little ax at his belt. I think it possible that he had something to do with the affair—"

He paused. Brother Simon finished the sentence for him.

"Of the escaped prisoner whom you recaptured."

"And who is now on his way to Paris. Exactly. By the way, Simon, have you heard any whispers uttered concerning the identity of the Nameless Exile?"

"None, monsieur. Dom Julien has been diligent in keeping the name unknown."

"Dom Julien does not know it himself," said de Lussan drily. "In fact, there are not five men in France who know it."

The ragged corner of the tapestry that hung across the fireplace, doing its continual devil's dance, waved slightly in the air as though in protest at these words.

"Another matter," went on Brother Simon. "Monsieur, there is here a scrivener who is also librarian, a lay brother called the Mole. He is a little man, presumably half-witted, with one shoulder higher than the other and very large ears."

"I have observed the man," said de Lussan, and his eyes narrowed sharply. "Surely that fellow has not been prying?"

"Oh, monsieur, it has nothing to do with the Nameless Exile, nothing at all! However, I distrust that creature, who is no more half-witted than I am. In point of fact, he is extraordinarily sharp of brain." There was a touch of venom in the voice of Simon, as if that sharp brain had made him squirm in time past. "Yesterday I caught him in the scriptorium with the Sieur d'Aumont. He pretended to be working on a charter, but that charter had been previously finished and illuminated by Brother Gabriel. The two men had been talking secretly, it was evident. I think, monsieur, that this creature might well repay an interrogation at Caen."

"An interrogation?" de Lussan frowned swiftly. He knew well enough what that meant. "You accursed Normans, will nothing stop your passion for torturing and burning? True, the English checked it when they introduced the custom of burying spies alive, but they spoiled their work by burning Jean d'Arc. Well, well, go on! On what grounds would you have this poor simpleton interrogated?"

"Monsieur is pleased to jest, but this is no jesting matter," said Brother Simon doggedly. "On the grounds of evident traffic with Satan. He has been seen to appear suddenly in odd corners of the abbey. The other day I left him at the King's Gate and came straight up to the Chatelet, yet he was loitering there ahead of me. Others have remarked his habit of invisible travel, particularly by night."

"Very well," said de Lussan carelessly. "I shall write to the delegate at Caen, and on his next visit he will inquire into the

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matter. Have your evidence ready. Now await me here. I may have instructions for you when I return."

So saying, de Lussan emptied the cup, rose and strode from the room to visit the prior.

Left alone, Brother Simon sank into a chair, investigated the wine flagon on the floor and lifted it. He relieved it of half its contents at one lengthy swig, then wiped his lips and sat placidly, quite at his ease. Behind him the fluttering tapestry moved again, although now there was no draft in the room.

AFTER some time de Lussan returned, his brows heavily drawn down, and Simon came out of the chair with agility. The count seated himself, poured more wine and sipped it, then looked up.

"You know Dom Nicolas Hougats, prior of St. Benoit at St. Malo?" he inquired, and the fat monk nodded assent. "He will arrive here in a fortnight, commissioned by M. de Pontchartrain to interview the Nameless Exile."

The fat monk looked astonished at this, as well he might.

"Ah, monsieur! But if a man does not speak French—"

"Then another man must be found to speak his language," said de Lussan. "On October 8, 1704, that is to say, not three years ago, one Omar Mahomet of Algiers was baptized by the Canon of St. Benoit. Since then, many others of the same infidel persuasion have been converted. How? Because that monastery has specialized in the study of Arabic and other eastern tongues."

"So!" exclaimed Brother Simon, thoughtfully. "So! Then the Nameless Exile, monsieur, is an Arabian!"

De Lussan gave him a slow, cruel look. "You're curious in the matter, are you?"

Under that regard, the monk paled perceptibly.

"I? Curious?" he faltered. "Not in the least, monsieur! I—I merely voiced a worldly thought."

"Keep your thoughts to yourself or suffer," said de Lussan with cold curtness. "When Dom Hougats arrives he will interview the exile in your presence. You will not understand what is said, but you will observe what is done. No letters must pass. If Dom Hougats gives or receives anything beyond words, he is to be arrested on the spot and sent to Avranches. Of course the prior of St. Benoit is to be trusted, but at the same time—."

"No trust is taken for granted. I understand, monsieur."

"Now we pass to another matter."

De Lussan sipped his wine, then took a pinch of snuff.

"The niece of Baron de Karque. Have you done as I bade you regarding an attendant?"

"As ordered, monsieur. The daughter of Pierre Oury, syndic of the town and married to a German woman, has been engaged to wait upon her. An honest, stupid girl who speaks German very well. She will not report much regarding Mlle. de Bebambourg, but I shall draw from her more than she realizes."

"Good. Papers, remember, documents of any kind!"

"If they exist, I shall have them."

"And you will forward them."

"Unopened, monsieur."

"You may depart."

Brother Simon, walking lightly as was his wont, departed. He threw open the heavy door, and the tapestry before the fireplace waved in the draft, but was immediately still again. Then, as the door slammed, the sound seemed to be curiously reechoed from that fireplace; so sharply, in fact, that de Lussan sprang up and in two swift strides reached the hearth. He pulled aside one corner of the tapestry. Nothing showed in the dim light except the fire-blackened stones.

"My imagination," he muttered and dropped the tapestry again. "Well, one never knows when dealing with these plagued monks."

Some little while after these events in the abbatial building, the man who occupied the third chamber of the six which composed the Perrine tower, sat on the edge of his bed in absolute darkness. Over the grilled window was hung his bed-cover. Over the door, hiding any possible glint of light from any one passing outside, was hung a blanket. Yet there was no glimmer of light within the chamber.

Then, suddenly, from some point close to the sitting man, came a faint scratching sound. The prisoner rapped twice on the stones with his knuckles. Almost at once, one of these large stones grated open, and

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presently there was the sense of a second person being in the room. Flint streaked on steel and sent sparks flying, tinder caught, and presently a candle was aglow. In this light was revealed the misshapen figure of the Mole, a flat wide packet beneath his arm, while behind him gaped a large, musty smelling hole in the side of the wall. The Mole set down his packet and shoved against the open stone, which swung shut again without a sound. Then he stood up and grinned vacuously at the occupant of the room, the man known as the Nameless Exile.

This man, now plainly revealed in the mounting candle light, was of perhaps sixty years. He wore an odd sort of black cassock, yet he was not tonsured, nor had been. His long hair and long square-cut beard were of an intense and deep black, thickly strewn with gray. His features were extremely high and intelligent, his dark eyes were very proud; his entire countenance was not only strikingly handsome, but evinced a peculiar nobility. Upon one of his long and slender fingers was a large signet ring, the stone being an oval onyx half an inch across, in which were graven curious letters in some unknown script, which might have been Hebrew, but was not.

Abruptly the Mole went to his knees and bowed his head above his folded hands. The prisoner lifted one hand in the attitude of benediction, closed his large eyes, and murmured a few words in a strange tongue. When he had finished, he lowered his hand to the Mole, who seized and kissed it and then rose. About this little scene was a strangely impressive dignity. The prisoner smiled at his visitor, indulgently, but did not break his silence. This man, who understood no French and spoke none, could communicate with his nocturnal visitor only by signs.

"Well, we're safe enough," said the Mole cheerfully, of necessity speaking to himself. "—— take that fat Simon! So he's trying to get me on the rack, is he? Well, such things take time, and in the meanwhile, the Mole goes on burrowing!"

He turned and took up his flat packet as though to open it, but the prisoner checked him. With a questioning glance, he pointed to the roof. The Mole glanced up, comprehended suddenly and chuckled.

"The man upstairs, eh? Up there? You want to know who he is?"

The prisoner comprehended tone and gesture, if not words, and nodded, his grave eyes watching the Mole intently.

"A friend. Oh, Satan fly away with me! You don't understand. You know no Latin. Ah! What's the word, now? *Amicus? Amicus* it is. I speak Latin, you Greek. Do you understand my Latin, then? *Amicus!*"

The prisoner nodded, and a sparkle came into his dark gaze. He pointed to the window, and made signs, gestures. Presently the Mole wrested some intelligence from all this, and his eyes widened.

"Oh! So M. d'Aumont, who has a letter for you, lowered a cord this evening, eh? Where is the cord?"

More signs. After some time, the Mole gathered that the Nameless Exile had not touched the lowered cord, being afraid of some trap or device of his enemies. At this the Mole chuckled, and then knuckled his teeth in thought for a moment.

"*Los á Monseigneur St. Michel!*" he exclaimed softly, exultantly. "I promised Rodomont I would visit him tonight, but it is impossible. The way is blocked and I cannot reach his cell. However, it might be worse. There is no guard above, and I can at least reach his ears. Out with the light, then!"

He quickly pinched out the candle, after which he stripped the bed cover away from the barred window. He placed his face against the bars. His voice rang out low, musical, yet penetrating.

"Rodomont! The cord!"

Silence responded. Once more the Mole called the name of Rodomont, and then there was a faint sound from the chamber above, as if something had fallen on the stone floor. The Mole grinned exultantly.

"We have a new patron, St. Rodomont!" he murmured. "Above there! The letter!"

Now the prisoner came close to the window beside the Mole, and his deep breathing sounded clearly with swift pants of excitement and eagerness. The two men waited, motionless. Unexpectedly, a tiny white thing appeared against the star-strewn square of sky in front of them. This was the letter, attached to the end of the cord. As it jerked downward, the Mole reached out one long and skinny arm between the bars and seized it.

"Direct the answer to London," floated down the voice of Domont.

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The Mole drew in the packet and unloosed the cord from about it. He jerked the cord twice, and it was drawn up from his touch. Putting the sealed packet into the trembling hands of the prisoner, the Mole now re-covered the window with great care, he himself almost as excited as the captive. This done, he fell to work relighting the candle, and presently its flame flickered up.

In this light, the prisoner examined the packet in his shaking fingers, tears of joy glinting on his bearded cheeks. He pressed the letter against his bosom, closed his eyes, and appeared as though in thankful prayer. Then, with an abrupt and hasty motion, he tore open the parchment. There was revealed, to the curious eyes of the Mole, a letter written in Greek. A flush in his pale cheeks, the prisoner rapidly scanned the lines, then lowered the letter and fastened a burning gaze upon the Mole.

"*Ketchedourian!*" he murmured, and gestured toward the upper room. "*Hatchadour Ketchedourian?*"

"Eh, eh?" exclaimed the Mole with sudden eagerness. "*Catchedour!* That's the name of the man de Lussan has recaptured and sent back to Paris, for I saw it written in one of the letters in de Lussan's chamber."

The Mole, obviously, was not afraid of confessing his sins of commission.

"*Ketchedourian!*" repeated the Nameless Exile affirmatively, then repeated his inquiring gesture to the room above. The Mole shook his head.

"No. Paris, the Bastille, I suppose. What a talk we would have if you knew much Latin or I knew any Greek! No, upstairs is an *amicus, amicus!* An Englishman, or what amounts to the same thing. English. Ah, that reaches you, does it?"

The prisoner's eyes blazed suddenly. He made gestures, as of one plucking and sharpening and splitting a quill, then of writing. The Mole understood, and nodded.

"Yes, but not tonight. Tomorrow. I have to get into the scriptorium for that, worshipful one! Do you understand me, Vertabed? Tomorrow! Your reply goes to London, *Londres, Londinium*—what the devil would the word be in Greek? How Rodomont hopes to deliver it, I'm blessed if I know."

"*Londres!*" exclaimed the prisoner, nodding excitedly and pointing to a word in the letter. He was not a fool, and it was clear that he understood perfectly.

NOW the Mole made an imperative gesture toward the candle and the letter. Recognizing the necessity, yet with obvious regret in his face, the Nameless Exile assented. He held out the missive to the flame. The fine parchment crinkled and curled, blazed, and finally dropped and was crushed into a flaky powder beneath the sandal of the Mole. So in a few seconds was destroyed the letter whose delivery had cost so dear.

The Mole opened up his flat packet to display a small chess board and a set of men, but at this the prisoner shook his head. He smiled gently, took the Mole's face between his hands, and kissed him on the brow.

"I blame you not for wanting no game tonight. Ah, that's a good soul!" exclaimed the Mole sorrowfully. "God help you, Vertabed! It's honest, noble men like you who are always destroyed by the —— scoundrels of intriguers and politicians. Aye, you're destroyed and your work is swept away, and yet the world goes on and on until you come again, and all's to do over! Now, I wonder why I don't give a thought to the benediction of Prior Julien or gaunt old Brother Benoit, whereas yours makes a catch come into my throat and the blessing of God rise in my soul, even if I don't understand the words?"

He shook his head mournfully, and began to put away his chess men.

"Well, well, the abbey church is a beautiful place, God wot, but there are cursed hard men in it. And if fat Brother Simon whimpers at the mass while he schemes to get me on the rack, there's something wrong somewhere in religion. Wall up proud Vertabed, and rack the humble Mole. Aye, that's their way! Tomorrow night, I'll bring you pen and ink and paper, unless I can steal a sheet of parchment or vellum. What is it in Greek, now? Pen, that should be *penna* for quill, eh? Understand that, do you? Good. Paper should be *papyros*, and ink—eh? Black—*mavro?* By St. Michel, you have it? —— take all Greek, say I. Good night, Avedis Vertabed. Is that right? Avedis Vertabed?"

The prisoner smiled a little, and his fingers went gently to the bare head of the Mole. "*Kala nikte!*" he said. "*Kyrie Eleison!*"

"*Kyrie Eleison!* Well, I know what that is, anyway." The Mole crossed himself as

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he rose. "Lord ha' mercy on the two of us! And so, good night to you."

He took up his packet, nodded to the prisoner, pinched out his candle, and the rest was darkness until one stone grated slightly on another. Silence fell.

Upon the following evening, vespers had been finished, the cells and chambers of the prisoners and exiles were locked for the night and, from the abbey cupola, rang the bells for the singing of the Magnificat. They rang the more sweetly, those high bells, for that thick fog had swooped down across the sands in the darkness. There was something fantastic in their chiming, so that the brethren glanced one at another with frowns, and Brother Simon muttered something about the Mole. After their song was done, however, the deep fog-bell sent out his booming clang to warn any late arriving pilgrims and to guide them until the tide came in and covered the dangerous sands.

The last services ended, the monastery and abbey were dark. Then, like some unearthly thing, a dim shape might have been seen gliding along that architectural wonder which spanned the empty space between the flying buttress and the roof, that lace staircase, as it was known, from its delicate tracery of carving, here laboriously constructed when Philip Augustus was lord of France. Across this to the gutters flew that dim shape like a black seraphim, and then melted into the shadows and was lost to sight.

Count de Lussan sat in his chamber, one of the few which were still lighted, and wrote letters. From time to time, the tapestry across the fireplace took up its devil's dance, and it waved more than ever when after a tap, the door opened to admit Brother Simon. The fat monk hastily closed the door and came forward to the table, a suppressed excitement in his manner.

"I have important news, monsieur!" he exclaimed, to de Lussan's inquiring look. "It is something you should know."

"You have my permission to speak," said de Lussan, eyeing him without love. "In connection with the Nameless Exile?"

"Not at all. With the niece of M. the Baron de Karque!"

"Ah!" de Lussan laid down his quill, and smiled slightly. "All the same, there may be more connection between the two than you imagine. Speak."

Simon shrugged at that.

"The girl attending mademoiselle saw me tonight. I have had no opportunity to reach you before now. She tells me that she heard mademoiselle talking, early this morning, in her sleep. The words were in English. The girl could not make them out, but she caught a name. It was Marie, and after it another name which the girl could not pronounce. She said it sounded like Sous-phoque, which I do not understand."

De Lussan took up his quill again, glanced at his letter and nodded.

"Very well," he said carelessly. "You have done right to tell me, Simon, though it is not of great importance. You may go."

Somewhat taken aback by this reception of his news, fat Simon departed. No sooner had the door slammed behind him, however, than de Lussan flung away his quill, was out of his chair, and strode back and forth with a blaze of excitement in his face. More than mere excitement glowed there, also.

"By all the saints, can this be?" he murmured, gripping his hands and pausing to stare at the blank wall. "Is that why the London spy tried to kill the girl. Oh, incredible, impossible! And yet, why not? What could that name have been but Suffolk, Mary Suffolk? I remember there was such a name at court, and did I not meet her? That was just before the peace was signed. No, I did not meet her. Oh, —— take it all, that fat rogue has dropped onto something large here! It is certain that she carried a letter, though she must have destroyed it. If this is true, if she is Mary Suffolk and not—"

He strode up and down again. Then, presently, he dropped into his chair and stared at the glittering candles. Now there was a cruel twitch to those thin lips of his, and the scar on his cheek glowed darkly. In his eyes was the intentness of the hunter who sees the prey within his very grasp.

"I dared not touch her before, but now, now!" he said aloud, with a sharp intake of breath. "She must have been sent in place of the baron's niece to bring a letter. Has she fooled de Karque also? By the mass, this is a game worth while. Yet I must make sure, make sure beyond error! Easy enough to do that, too—but when? Hm! I'm off early in the morning to meet that cursed Norman fool. Perhaps I can do it on the way. If not, I'll do it later.

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"Now I'll have to change my plans, return here tomorrow night and spend a few days. If this thing's true, I'll teach the wench a thing or two. The little beauty will learn something, eh? Yes, a change of plans and a return here tomorrow night. Now, shall I get a *lettre de cachet* for her, or not? No, time lacks, and it's not necessary. I'll clap her into a coach and take her to Caen under arrest. By the time I have enough of her, M. de Pontchartrain may have what's left for questioning. It works out prettily, by St. Michel! A pretty game! But first to make sure of the prey."

In his thin, hearty laughter he did not observe the tapestry waving at the fireplace.

At nearly the same time of the same evening, Roger Domont was sitting in his own prison chamber, staring out of the dark room at the fog which hid the stars and finishing a bottle of good wine that Baron de Karque had sent him. He was thinking of the note that had come with the bottle. At nine in the morning, he was to meet the baron at the barbican below, where horses would be waiting. They would spend the day hunting together on the Norman coast, returning to the Mont with low tide, before vespers. There was no mention of de Lussan, but Domont knew what lay behind the words.

It was the matter of return which irked Domont sorely, yet since he had passed his word to return hither, he would keep it. At the same time, he was resolved to kill de Lussan. And once the king's deputy were slain, he would have little further opportunity of escape. Domont wanted very badly to be off with St. Martin at once, yet it was not his promise alone which drew him back here to the Mont. The blue eyes of Mary Suffolk, and the girl's own peril, summoned him.

"It was almost incredibly easy to deliver that letter after all," he reflected. "Will there be a reply for her to take, I wonder? The Mole must have been in the room underneath me last night. I could swear to that voice of his. Well, my pay's earned, my errand done. If I can earn Mary Suffolk's pay for her also, and my own passage with her in the Dutch lugger, so much the better. Bide the time. That's the thing to do."

He started. A faint sound reached him as though some one in the chamber below had struck the ceiling. Domont rose, stamped with his foot for response, then got out his ball of cord and lowered the weighted end from the window. Almost at once, it was seized and drawn taut and held.

Then, for a long while, nothing happened. Domont lighted his pipe and composed himself to unhurried waiting. He had knocked the pipe clean, before there came two pulls at the cord, which then swung clear. He drew it up, and found the end securely knotted around two letters. Since no candles were allowed the exiles at this season, he had no light, but one letter was sealed and the other unsealed, so that he guessed the latter must be for him.

Not until the morning light broke in upon him and roused him from slumber could Domont learn anything about those two letters. Then, however, he learned enough and to spare. The one was heavily waxed and sealed with a large signet, whose device of queer characters he could not decipher. This one, bearing no address, was obviously the letter from the Nameless Exile to London.

The other letter, unsealed, was addressed to himself, and spoke bluntly enough:

St. Martin is to be drugged and thrown into jail when he returns to Pontorson from his errand after that horse. He is suspected of throwing that little hatchet at his belt. What it means, I am not sure.

Mlle. de Bebambourg, who it seems also bears an English name, talks in her sleep. Her maid, a spy, betrays the talk. Dangerous business for a wife, and more dangerous for a spy. I shall try to warn her today that de Lussan knows everything. Did I not tell you that he was the devil?

It is a pretty game, Rodomont. De Lussan wants her body before he arrests her. Therefore we are given a little time. Kill him today, and you avoid three things: The wooden cage for yourself, the rack for me, and something worse for her. I trust you to destroy this.

No signature. None needed.

Struck by dismay and consternation as he was at this message, Domont was yet more deeply struck by sheer wonder. Decidedly, if de Lussan were the devil, this little Mole with the twisted body was ten devils rolled into one!

## CHAPTER VIII

### BULLET FOR WHIP

THE *billet* given Domont by the prior had not been revoked, so that he experienced no difficulty when he left the Chatelet that morning. As he made his

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way toward the town, he looked anxiously for some sign of the Mole, but in vain. The King's Gate appeared deserted save for two invalided soldiers on duty.

At length, when Domont was past the barriers and approaching the barbican across the cobbled little square, he saw saddled horses in waiting outside. The tide was at ebb, and the lower town here was crowded with folk from the mainland. Domont made his way through the throng, and outside the gate discerned Baron de Karque, his pseudo-niece, and Count de Lussan. They greeted him cordially enough.

"Good morning, my friend!" exclaimed the baron. "All ready? I have arranged for a boat to bring us back this afternoon. We can not await the next tide, which will be too late. To horse, gentlemen!"

Domont met the eyes of the girl, fastened upon him in anxious alarm. He bowed over her hand, but dared not attempt any private speech with her. With de Lussan it was otherwise, however. The handsome Frenchman, tapping his hip-boot with his riding whip, drew the girl's hand to his lips. Then, smiling into her face, uttered two low words which Domont heard. She went white, but made no response.

The words uttered by de Lussan were—

"Mary Suffolk!"

Domont could only give her a reassuring smile and a wave of his hand, and then he was off. He rode away at the side of de Karque, with de Lussan in advance. And his heart was sore for the girl behind, who must now think that her imposture was known, her secret betrayed and herself lost. His only hope was that the Mole might make good his promise and give her some warning. So Domont faced ahead, to a day of stranger experiences than he could dream.

The baron chatted gaily, and handed to Domont a baldric and extra sword which he carried. He was keenly anticipative of the coming duel, and in his important manner, was already ruling the affair himself.

"This is an excellent blade I brought for you," he said, glancing at the sword which Domont was fastening about his shoulders. "It is a piece of rare German steel, my friend, a trifle longer than ordinary, but de Lussan has quite approved your use of it. Death of my life! I hope that you will kill this pig ahead of us!"

"I shall do so," said Domont quietly. De Karque chuckled.

"He is possessed of equal confidence, it seems. Well, it will be a fight, I warn you! He'll pick up a second at Pontorson where there are always some cavaliers of the *maréchaussée*. We are riding to the ruined tower of St. Gilles, a few miles from Pontorson. You know the place, no doubt?"

D'Aumont did, if Domont did not.

"It is an excellent spot for our affair, I understand," pursued the baron complacently, puffing out his cheeks and regarding the bare yellow sands around from his slightly protruding eyes, which lent him an expression of eternal astonishment. "Have you considered the outcome, however? If you should kill the count, it will be very unfortunate for you. M. de Ponchartrain will undoubtedly be angry, and so will the king, not to mention Monsieur and certain royal duchesses. This de Lussan is in all good graces. Really, my friend, you should content yourself with less. Let me kill him instead, for I am quite capable of dealing with any discontent, and they will not dare send me to the Bastille."

"Thank you, but I intend to kill him," said Domont calmly, and the finality of his manner settled the argument.

He had quite made up his mind to the affair, indeed. Through his head was ceaselessly running that ominous trilogy penned by the Mole, "—the wooden cage for yourself, the rack for me, and something worse for her!"

Since de Lussan now guessed or knew the girl's secret, Domont was well aware of the peril in which she stood. As the niece of de Karque, she was quite safe from the advances even of de Lussan. But as a spy, she was practically in the same class with a peasant girl or a serf. De Lussan was a thorough aristocrat, a coldly polished thing of steel and stone so far as any feeling of humanity or sympathy went. Aside from his class arrogance, he was responsible to none except the king or minister.

Yet there was also St. Martin to consider. How to save the Canadian from the fate that awaited him, even by killing de Lussan, caused Domont torments of uncertainty. If St. Martin had gone to Avranches to dispose of the diamond, he might not return to Mont St. Michel for some days. Domont now recalled that votive heart of brass, and he did not doubt that St. Martin himself must have delivered the message which would seal his fate. It might be possible to

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leave a letter for him at the Pontorson inn, but that was a long chance.

So, chatting lightly enough with Baron de Karque as he rode, but conning other and weightier matters in his mind, Domont came in past the long headland to Pontorson and the roadway winding up from the yellow sands. They had passed many folk going to the Mont, and the little town itself was all in a bustle, for a large party of pilgrims had just arrived and were being examined by the cavaliers of the guard before being permitted to pass on.

The three horsemen worked their way through the crowd on the road, de Lussan wielding his riding whip to the peasants, and so turned in at the gateway of the inn. Then, as he entered, Domont caught a sudden hearty curse from de Lussan, and saw a foam-lathered horse standing in the courtyard ahead. Holding the horse's bridle, and just lifting a great pewter cup of wine to his lips was St. Martin.

With a shout, Domont leaped from the saddle. He hurled himself at the Canadian, caught the startled man in what was apparently an embrace of enthusiastic delight, and managed to knock the cup aside so that the wine was spilled.

"Well met, well met!" he cried boisterously. "Ha, St. Martin! Get a fresh horse and ride with us! Join us inside over a flagon."

St. Martin's dark gaze gripped into him. In that swarthy face Domont perceived something ominous, portentous, even desperate.

"—— take you, d'Aumont. You've spilled wine down my boots!" he growled out, then broke into a short laugh.

He turned and bowed to the baron and the frowning de Lussan.

"Come!" said the baron promptly. "The question of a second is solved. I trust, my dear St. Martin, that you are free to ride with us? Well, well, join us over our morning draught and we may discuss the matter. I shall order a horse for you at all events. Inside, gentlemen, inside! Let us get away from this confounded crowd of peasants."

The four men passed inside the inn for the usual drink which took the place of breakfast. As they followed the baron and the count, St. Martin gripped long fingers into the arm of Domont.

"The ——'s own news—"

"Keep it. Your wine was drugged."

There was time only for the sharp word or two. They joined the others, and the innkeeper, who had noted the sharp eye of Domont, brought wine. The Bostonnais, however, saw him shrug helplessly before the glance of de Lussan. Domont found the seals of the bottles unbroken and, following the custom of the countryside, the four men touched glasses over the table. Then de Lussan spoke, courteously enough, to St. Martin.

"I shall be honored, M. de St. Martin, if you will do me the honor of acting as my second in a meeting with M. d'Aumont."

"Either as second or principal, with all my heart!" exclaimed the Canadian readily.

Domont was inexpressibly relieved. In the eyes of the count he had read indecision, for it was patent that de Lussan had hesitated whether to arrest the man from Canada or not. Having resolved to let the matter wait, de Lussan now set down his cup and addressed the baron.

"Monsieur, you will understand that if by any accident, such as befell the other morning, M. d'Aumont should kill me, he would be in danger of stern treatment from certain persons at Versailles. I have therefore written to M. de Pontchartrain a letter, which I confide to you."

From his pocket he took a sealed paper, and handed it to de Karque.

"In the event of my death, this will entirely absolve M. D'Aumont from any blame. In the event of his death, which I confidently expect, I shall bear my own case against his family without assistance."

"Spoken like a gentleman!" Domont came impulsively to his feet. "M. de Lussan, I fully intend to kill you, but first I drink to you."

"And I fully intend to kill you, monsieur," returned de Lussan with a dark look, "but I do not intend to take advantage of you."

St. Martin leaned forward and touched his cup to that of de Lussan.

"Monsieur, I am honored in your choice of seconds," he said, and with such sincerity in his tone that the Frenchman flashed him a smile of thanks.

THE drink and the exchange of courtesies ended, they returned to the courtyard after de Karque had paid the score, and found a horse being saddled for St. Martin. As they waited, a yellow-haired Norman peasant, stooped and gnarled, approached them. His



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bearded features were powerful, but his blue eyes were those of a wild beast.

"M. le Comte!"

De Lussan turned, and his brows went up. "Ah, Gabriac!" he said coldly. "So you are still alive, eh?"

"Yes, M. le Comte," returned the peasant with a decided snarl. "And my daughter is—where? She went at your bidding to Paris. What have you done with her?"

De Lussan's face hardened.

"What is that to you?" he demanded arrogantly.

A sudden intensity of passion shook the yellow-haired countenance of the peasant, blazed out in the blue eyes.

"Body of God, is she not my daughter? Where is she, you —— aristocrat?"

"That is not your affair," said de Lussan, with a slight shrug. "You are the serf of M. de Kerian. It is for him to ask questions, not you. Get to your kennel!"

The cold contempt of his manner was frightful. The gnarled peasant shivered, though not with any fear.

"I have asked you twice where she is," he said in a hoarse voice. "Ah, you ——, you ——!"

A knife flashed out in his hand.

Calmly, de Lussan swung his riding whip, and slashed the man twice across the face, blows that stung, blinded, brought blood running, sent the peasant stumbling to one side. Two cavaliers of the guard came running, seized the groaning, reeling man and brought him back before de Lussan.

"We saw the whole affair, M. le Comte," spoke out one. "To the Charité?"

"By no means," said de Lussan with an air of unconcern. "He is not my serf, but that of M. de Kerian. Let the dog go free. Your horse is ready, St. Martin. Off, gentlemen!"

The four men swung into the saddle and rode away from the inn.

Domont scarce heeded the incident which had just passed. By the demeanor of St. Martin, he knew well that his friend carried some tidings that sought urgent delivery, yet for this there was no immediate opportunity. De Lussan beckoned the Canadian and began to talk with him, riding in the lead. From a chance word or two, Domont gathered that they were discussing conditions of the duel to come.

"You heard what passed, there?" Baron de Karque gave Domont a look and a grimace, as they rode after the other pair. "I have no desire to criticize my adopted country, but I find that the ways of its nobility are sometimes wonderful to comprehend. Now, if I were de Lussan, I would not sleep easy of nights with that peasant at large."

"You are not de Lussan," said Domont significantly.

"Thank the saints for that! It is true that a pretty wench is a gift of heaven and not to be despised. And," the baron added with some complacency, "I confess that these flaxen-haired Norman girls keep me from becoming homesick. At the same time, you understand, there is a certain way of handling these affairs."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Domont, and smiled slightly. "I presume that since the advent of your niece, you must assume the tonsure and cowl?"

"Ah, yes, to a certain extent. But not the vows, I assure you. And," pursued de Karque frankly, "you will find that Mont St. Michel is a place which possesses peculiar advantages. That is, so far as the lower town is concerned."

St. Martin drew rein and fell back between them, giving Domont one look of frowning resignation, and then turned to the baron.

"I am instructed by my principal, monsieur," he said with formality, "that this duel is to the death, despite wounds or other accidents. Is it so understood by your principal?"

"Entirely so, I assure you," returned the baron. "I believe the spot is only a scant league from Pontorson, so that we may arrange details when we get there."

St. Martin assented and rejoined the count, and all four men rode on through the morning in silence.

Presently they neared the place selected for the meeting—one of the many ruined and abandoned structures of ancient days which dotted the Norman hills. Dismounting, they tethered the horses by the roadside, and then traversed a path across a small thicket of trees which led them after a hundred yards into a grassy glade. Above this, on a little eminence, arose the ruins of the long-deserted keep of St. Gilles. A brook trickled past, and at this de Lussan knelt, when he had removed his upper garments, to bathe face and wrists. Domont followed his example.

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St. Martin and de Karque now walked together over the greensward and selected a spot free of mole-runs. They measured the rapiers, deciding that these were equal. If Domont's were longer, that of de Lussan was a trifle thicker and had a notch near the hilt to snap an enemy blade. Domont waited quietly, stripped to his shirt, and de Lussan likewise. The seconds rejoined them, de Karque moving with a pompous air of importance as he presented the weapons.

"You are ready, gentlemen? Your swords," he announced, bowing. "The meeting is to be to the death. There is to be no intervention or delay because of wounds. If either of you is disarmed, he rests at the mercy of his opponent. You understand?"

A nod of assent. The four men walked together to the selected place. Domont, sword in hand, faced the other man, read the deadly enmity in those dark eyes and smiled slightly. He had already measured de Lussan.

"Commend your soul to God, monsieur," said the count coldly.

"And you yours, monsieur, to the devil," said Domont, with an air of grave calculation. "At the fourth pass, I shall kill you."

De Lussan's eyes flickered a trifle. In those sober words he perceived not a threat, but a prophecy. He became watchful, alert, cautious.

"*En garde*, messieurs!" said the baron, and stepped aside, snuffbox in hand. The two opponents saluted, and the steel met.

For a moment the blades hung crossed in the sunlight, as though frozen together. Then de Lussan disengaged and lunged with swift and deadly accuracy. So sudden was that thrust, Domont parried it only by a miracle of alertness, returning it with a lunge that failed of its mark.

"One!" he said quietly.

Again the thin rapiers met and glinted together. Now de Lussan took the offensive savagely, driving in vicious thrust after thrust, his wrist like steel, his face hard-lined and tense. He was, as he had foretold, fighting much better than on the previous occasion, and his dark eyes were fastened in hatred upon those of Domont. The latter, unmoving, seemed as though defended by a wall of flaming steel, until suddenly he drove in an unexpected ripost which de Lussan escaped only by a backward leap.

"Two!" said Domont.

Still de Lussan held to the offensive. Now he summoned up trick after trick, plied his weapon like a darting flame, head thrust forward, sweat beginning to break upon his face, dark eyes savage with the lust to kill. Domont stood like a rock, but his opponent was crafty. Exultation blazed in the dark eyes, the steel flickered in and out and Domont felt a prick at his neck. He knew that blood was drawn. Instantly he lunged, a terrific thrust that bore aside de Lussan's guard and touched the other's ribs, though only slightly.

"Three!" said Domont, his voice impassive. "And now—"

With a low oath, and a spot of crimson spreading on his white shirt, de Lussan flung forward to the attack. But at this instant came the thunder of horses at the gallop, a rising storm of shouts and cries. Baron de Karque sprang forward, knocking up the two crossed swords with his own drawn blade.

Into the opening among the trees came bursting men in uniform, running, cavaliers of the *maréchaussée*. These, at sight of the scene facing them, came to a sudden dismayed halt. One advanced, an officer, who swept off his plumed hat and bowed.

"Messieurs, I regret—"

"Explain this intrusion!" snapped de Lussan in angry hauteur.

"Your pardon, M. le comte," returned the other, panting with his haste. "That hulking serf, that peasant who assaulted at the Pontorson tavern, stole a pistol and was said to have followed your party. We thought that—that—there might be trouble."

De Lussan appeared not to hear the words. Flicking out a handkerchief of filmy lace, he wiped his sword-hilt free of sweat; then, with a slightly bored air, he turned to Domont and spoke.

"Monsieur, I can only trust that you will overlook this most unfortunate interference, which I regret extremely. We have in this corps of cavaliers, it seems, a number of gentlemen who have had no instruction in the ethics of conduct or the duel." He regarded the officer with a cutting stare as bitterly intolerant as his words. "M. le Sous-Lieutenant, you have my most cordial permission to betake yourself to the ——, with your men—and the quicker about it, the better!"

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Flushing scarlet with humiliation and anger, yet not daring to reply, the officer bowed, then gestured to his men. They trooped back among the trees and were lost to sight. De Lussan shrugged and glanced at the baron.

"Your intervention is needless, M. de Karque. Monsieur is ready."

The baron retreated, and the two opponents faced each other anew. Domont smiled as he fell on guard.

"It's a pity to kill you, de Lussan. *En garde!*"

"At your service, monsieur," and de Lussan lunged.

Domont parried.

"We may now resume the count. I believe that I had just called three. Well, then—"

The opening came, the opening for which Domont had been waiting and hoping. He was in the very act of driving home the thrust, and the word "four!" was upon his lips, when suddenly de Lussan whirled half around and fell sidewise, untouched by his blade, so that Domont staggered with the force of his lost blow. At the same instant, the bellow of a pistol arose from the nearest copse of trees.

"Die, ravisher!" swirled up a wild, fierce yell, and for an instant the yellow-bearded face of Gabriac, aflame with maniacal ferocity, glared out upon the scene. Then it was gone in a flash.

De Lussan came to one elbow.

"After him!" he gasped. "I—I am—not hurt—"

The words died, and he fell full length.

St. Martin was already leaping into the brush, though he was too late to catch the assassin. The cavaliers, however, had not yet departed from the road outside the thicket. Now there came a flurry of shouts, followed by a crash of several pistolets, and then one shrill screaming voice that was abruptly silenced. Presently St. Martin returned, with a grim nod.

"They killed him."

DOMONT upheld the head of his late enemy, while de Karque made an examination. The ball had struck de Lussan in the left side, glancing across the ribs. There was a tremendously ragged wound that welled forth blood, but little serious injury. Next moment the officer and his men were running in from the trees. De Lussan was unconscious, and while two of the men bound up his hurt, Baron de Karque talked with the officer, discussing what had happened and what was to be done.

Domont caught the eye of St. Martin, and stepped to one side with him, beyond earshot of the others. A swift exclamation broke from the Canadian.

"Rodomont, there's the —— to pay!"

"There are ten ——s to pay," said Domont harshly, "since I can't very well kill de Lussan now. Go on. What's happened?"

"Your cousin is dead."

"What! D'Aumont dead!" Domont whirled, faced his friend incredulously. "But it can't be. He was not so badly hurt."

"Dead as the Mohawk we burned at Michillimackinac," affirmed St. Martin gloomily. "All was going well, it seemed, when the fool got into some wine and guzzled half a dozen bottles of it. He was in a raging fever yesterday and died an hour before dawn. I sold that ring in Avranches, by the way, and got eight hundred livres for it. Lost my way and had to go through Avranches, else the mischance might never have happened. Poor d'Aumont was worried about you. He had realized about the *lettre de cachet* and was anxious to be on his feet and get to the Mont to take your place. Last thing he said was to tell you to cut and run for it at all costs."

"No need of telling me that," said Domont morosely, then perceived Baron de Karque coming toward them.

"Gentlemen, we have decided to take M. de Lussan to Ardevon, one of the abbey's fiefs, a quarter-league from here, and thence by boat to the Mont. Shall we all go in company?"

Domont had no mind for this. He needed a space to compose himself from this stunning information, and wanted badly to talk with St. Martin.

"What about luncheon?" he asked. "I think you ordered it at Pontorson."

"Ah, true!" The baron pursed up his lips. Then he removed his huge curled periwig, and mopped his shaven skull. "True. An excellent meal and admirable wines. Hm! Suppose I see the boat off with de Lussan, then return here for you. There is no surgeon at the Mont, so we shall have to get the man from Pontorson,

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in any event, to attend de Lussan. That's the best plan. I'll leave this accursed wig in your care, if I may. It's too hot in these woods."

The baron clapped his hat on his shining pate and made off. Frowningly, Domont watched as the cavaliers, carrying the senseless de Lussan, filed away after de Karque. Then, when the little glade was again deserted, St. Martin spoke.

"When he comes back, run him through and ride on to St. Malo."

"Wait, comrade. Let me tell you the situation."

A certain desperation in his soul, Domont related what had taken place during St. Martin's absence from the mount. He went on to tell about Mary Suffolk and the girl's predicament, in view of the letter he had received from the Mole and what he had overheard from de Lussan's lips at leaving the Mont that morning.

"We've earned our pay, and I have in my pocket the prisoner's letter for Mary Suffolk and London. So far, so good," he concluded. "On the other hand, this thrice-accursed Norman peasant has ruined everything for us, since he not only failed to kill de Lussan, but kept me from doing it. At the very instant I was thrusting for the man's heart! Fate has played us a scurvy trick today."

"Fate's way," said St. Martin uneasily. "If our business is done, what's to prevent our going on to St. Malo?"

"We are dealing with honorable men," said Domont, "and I have given de Karque my word of honor to return with him to the mount."

St. Martin cursed softly.

"Honor always makes trouble for men like you and me," he growled. "So then, de Lussan knows everything! He'll be up and around tomorrow. He'll be a long while finishing this duel with you, but he is not badly damaged. If you go back to Mont St. Michel, there'll be the —— to pay. That fat swine of an innkeeper is wild with fright over d'Aumont's death and may confess everything at Avranches. It seems that I'm under suspicion and slated for arrest. Comrade, you're going to have your scalp danced, sure as fate, if you go back! Your cousin is dead and can't show up to relieve you from prison now."

"Oh, I know, I know," exclaimed Domont with a groan.

"Then —— honor, and take to your heels. What's to hinder?"

"My word to de Karque and the fact that de Lussan's alive."

"Hm! What about the yellow-haired girl, eh?"

Domont nodded silently. Then, filling his pipe, he began to pace up and down the green glade, while St. Martin sat down and vented his feelings in low oaths. Both men realized that they faced an *impasse*.

The unexpected death of Roger d'Aumont was a swift and vital blow, instantly transforming the whole affair from comic drama to stark tragedy. Now Domont was indeed doomed to fill the other man's shoes for good or ill, and his only safe course was to take to flight while he still had a chance to escape. A word from de Lussan, and a company of the *maréchaussée* would close in upon the island and arrest all concerned. The fact that the imposture of Mary Suffolk was known, alone spelled certain peril, for it must be evident to de Lussan that she was actively concerned in the affair of the Nameless Exile. Presently Domont strode back to St. Martin, came face to face with the Canadian, and spoke curtly.

"Comrade, take the best horse remaining out there and ride."

"Eh?" The other scowled. "And you?"

"I can't do it," said Domont quietly. "I'm not sure that my parole alone would hold me, to be frank, but there's Mary Suffolk. I can't abandon her. Somewhere there must be a way of escape for her. And, as much as anything else, there's the Mole."

St. Martin ground out a savage oath. "That imp of damnation?"

"That friend," said Domont steadily. "The most that a man can be proud of, St. Martin, is his friends."

"You cursed fool!" cried the other in impassioned anger. "If you think I'll run and desert you, think again! I stay with you."

"No." Domont frowned. "You shall go— Ah! What's that?"

His eyes had fallen upon the heavy gold-laced coat of the baron, left with his periwig and the other coats. He darted to it swiftly, and rummaged through the pockets. To his delight he found the tortoise-shell snuff-box in his fingers, and drew it out.

"Now's the time to see what's here," he exclaimed. Ruthlessly, he flung down the little box and smashed it under his foot. From the fragments of shell and gold and

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snuff, he drew forth a small folded sheet of thin paper, on which were three lines of writing.

What the bearer does, is done by our command.
ANNE, R.

A low whistle escaped Domont—less at the writing itself than at what such a paper implied.

"Look you, comrade! Here, at the very risk of causing war and embroiling nations, was a way of escape given the girl in case she were caught or betrayed in the business, only to be used in most urgent need, you may be sure!"

"The English queen, eh?" St. Martin shrugged. "I'll warrant she looks after her spies better than the painted doll at Versailles looks after his!"

Domont seized his arm suddenly, drew him to his feet, face blazing with eagerness.

"Here's our way out, St. Martin! Take this paper, hide it, and ride to St. Malo with all haste! There seek the Dutch lugger. If she is not yet arrived, await her. Watch your words carefully. The fact that you speak English means a good deal now. Don't show this order unless it's necessary, and be sure of your man before you show it. Then you'll be obeyed."

"Hm! To what end?"

"Rescue. Tomorrow is Sunday. A week from tomorrow have that lugger come to Mont St. Michel. Sunday night at high tide, whenever it befalls. If not then, the following Sunday. We dare not put it before Sunday, as the lugger may not yet be at St. Malo, and we must take our chance as to what happens at the Mont before then."

St. Martin grunted doubtfully, yet his eyes kindled at the prospect.

"Think you she can sail up to the Mont and pick us off like a bale of peltries?"

"Aye. You remember that little tower on the seaward face where the windmill stands? I'll show a light from that tower, and the lugger can send in a boat. You comprehend? Then off with you, for now you don't ride to save yourself, but to save all of us! Off, and luck follow you!"

St. Martin nodded and thrust the paper into his pocket. Then he drew forth a double handful of gold coins and thrust them at Domont.

"Here, you may need money. Agreed! The signal, a lantern showing from the windmill tower, for Sunday night. I'll come back to the Mont and let you know how it goes."

"Don't do that!" cried Domont sharply. "You can't risk it—"

"My good comrade, kindly go to the —— with your orders!" St. Martin flung out an eager, joyous peal of laughter, and clapped Domont on the shoulder. "Play your own game and let me play mine. Now that I see sense in the riding, I'll ride! And I'll hide this tomahawk of mine, since it betrays me. But unless I miss my guess, the trail will be red ere it's washed away in water. Hide the pieces of gold and *ecaille*. There—farewell!"

Before Domont had flung the bits of broken snuffbox into the nearest bushes, St. Martin was gone from sight among the trees. Domont, however, had no great hopes of seeing him again. Before the next Sunday came around, the net of intrigue might well have snared its victims.

## CHAPTER IX

### ANOTHER SORT OF MOLE

SOMETIMES, not often, one will encounter a fat man who, behind an apparent jollity, will hold in his piggish eyes a lurking maleficence. Such a one is liable to misjudgment in more ways than one. He will appear clumsy and lethargic, when in fact he is of extraordinary agility in body and mind; he will be deemed a boorish mass of fat, when he may actually be an ambitious mass of sinew; he will be considered a tender-hearted unfortunate, when in reality he may cherish cruelly a grudge against the world.

Brother Simon had not become a confidential agent of the all-powerful minister who ruled France without gaining an accurate knowledge of how priors and abbots were made in these days of intrigue and wire pulling. History is silent as to his name before he donned the black cassock, yet a hint regarding his true quality is to be found in a letter addressed by M. de Pontchartrain to Dom Julien Doyte:

This man is of a peculiar worth, and if the 'de' of nobility is not found in his present name, so much the more praise to his humility. Cherish him, I adjure you.

Brother Simon was cherished, although he was not disposed to depend upon others for cherishing, particularly where fast days were concerned.

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When Count de Lussan was brought back to Mont St. Michel by boat, being immediately put to bed in an empty chamber of the King's Gate to avoid the lift up to the Marvel above, Brother Simon at once set to work turning the event to his own purposes. Perhaps he entertained a vivid resentment of the arrogance and cold contempt with which the king's deputy had treated him. Certain it is that Brother Simon soon joined the cavaliers who had come across in the boat, finding them in the guard-house to the right of the barbican. There he proved himself a jolly and boon companion over the winecups, and managed to pick up many interesting facts regarding the events which had transpired ashore that same morning.

Presently Brother Simon climbed toilsomely up to the abbey once more, and there made his way to the handsome old chamber which was occupied by de Lussan, but now temporarily deserted. Here he spent a profitable half-hour inspecting documents and papers, and used a goodly amount of the deputy's stationery in the concoction of a lengthy epistle to M. de Pontchartrain.

He reported his discovery of an English spy in the Mont, stated that M. de Lussan had abandoned his duty in order to fight a duel in Normandy with an exile, and there had been seriously wounded by a peasant whose daughter he had some time previously debauched. All this covered, he prayed that he might be immediately advised what course to pursue in view of de Lussan's condition, and so signed and sealed the missive. He despatched it that same day by the cavaliers returning to Pontorson, and considered that he had done a very neat stroke of business.

The same ebb-tide that saw the letter depart, witnessed the return of Baron de Karque, Domont and the surgeon from Pontorson. Brother Simon was on hand to meet them. He was at present more concerned in the health of de Lussan than in anything else, and went at once with the surgeon to inspect the wounded noble.

Domont, on the other hand, cared nothing about de Lussan, but was vitally interested in getting a word apart with Mary Suffolk, which he soon managed. Baron de Karque had made the most of the good wine at Pontorson, and retired to his own chamber in some disorder, leaving Domont to walk on the ramparts with his niece. To her Domont frankly related his entire story, which was her first indication of his real self and what he was doing here. She listened gravely, but it was impossible to remain serious before that affair of bungled letters, and her mood brightened.

"Why, then," she exclaimed smilingly, "we are both impostors!"

"And both destined to find ourselves in hot water when de Lussan gets on his feet. Have you seen the Mole, or he you?"

She flushed a little.

"Yes. It appears that I talk in my sleep. Now, what are we to do? Have you any hopes of getting a letter for me from the Nameless Exile?"

"It's in my pocket. I'll slip it into your hand before I leave," said Domont, with a gesture toward the guards walking the ramparts above.

The girl's blue eyes deepened on him in wide astonishment.

"You're not jesting? You have it already?"

"Yes. And now we must get away. My friend St. Martin has gone to St. Malo to look up that Dutch lugger of yours. If she is there, he will have her here a week from tomorrow, Sunday night, to take us off. Despite the danger, I dared not make the appointment for an earlier day. The lugger may not yet be there, and things are uncertain. You must be ready. We are to display a lantern on the little tower above the shore that carries a windmill."

"I'll be ready," she said. "But you had better not give me that letter. Keep it. My maid is a spy, it seems, and anything may happen to me."

"Your uncle, by the way, has lost his snuff box."

"What?" She paled suddenly, then met his smile with anxious gaze. "Oh! But it has not been—"

"I gave the paper which it contained to St. Martin, to make certain that the lugger would not fail us. It is our only hope, I'm afraid. Ah, now be careful, be careful! Here is the arch spy of all!"

Brother Simon appeared coming toward them, his little eyes prying and probing, belying the jovial smiles that wreathed his heavy jowl. Domont inquired after the count, and Brother Simon sighed profoundly.

"Ah, we must burn tapers for him in the crypt of the Thirty, monsieur! He is in no

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actual danger, but has lost much blood. The surgeon is afraid lest fever come on him. For the present he will remain where he is, though we shall perhaps move him up to his own chamber in a couple of days."

Here Brother Simon turned to the girl, and spoke in very fair English, to her great surprize.

"He must be given a sleeping potion tonight in a cup of wine. Will you take charge of it, mademoiselle? It is difficult to trust the domestics, you comprehend."

"Gladly," said the girl. Brother Simon handed her a tiny vial filled with a murky green fluid. "At what hour?"

"With his dinner. It will cause him to sleep very deeply all day tomorrow. On Monday he will awaken, refreshed and himself once more. Give him the entire vial tonight, in a cup of hot spiced wine."

"Very well."

The brother turned to Domont.

"Will you walk with me to the Marvel?"

"I am not yet returning," said Domont shortly.

Brother Simon ignored the rebuff and, with a smiling nod, passed on his way, the ponderous black figure withdrawing toward the upper town. Domont frowned after him, then felt the gaze of Mary Suffolk upon him. He turned, met her eyes and then stood staring, paralyzed by sudden comprehension. They both realized the same thing, almost at the same instant. No words passed and none were needed. Brother Simon had addressed the girl in English, had spoken to Domont in the same tongue, and Domont had replied unthinking.

"Well! Another drawstring comes taut on the net. Luckily, it was set for me and not for you," said Domont quietly after a moment. "Now, if I thought we could make St. Malo, I would say to mount and ride at once. But it would be impossible. Our only escape lies by sea. Do you think we could get hold of a fishing boat, at night?"

"I doubt it. I've thought of that myself," returned the girl. "Each night the boats are pulled up among that little nest of rocks just to the right of the barbican, below the walls. Two men are always on watch there, sometimes more."

Domont shrugged resignedly.

"Brother Simon spoke as though he wanted to talk over something. Another trap, perhaps. He's a smooth rascal!"

At this moment appeared the wry-necked serving man Karl. He saluted the girl, gave Domont a dark look, and sped past on the run. He was very much in a hurry, and presently caught up with the solemnly climbing Brother Simon on the Great Outer Degree, before the Chatelet was reached.

"Return, Brother Simon!" he panted. "Return quickly, for M. de Lussan wants you at once! He is in a —— of a temper, also."

His temper was no worse than that of the fat brother at the prospect of another trip to the bottom of the hill. And Simon uttered an exclamation which, had it reached the abbey precincts, would have drawn him at least five days of silence and confinement.

"What does he want?"

"He wants you to write a letter which must be sent off tonight without fail."

"Get up with you, then." Brother Simon motioned toward the Chatelet. "Inform Dom Julien Doyte where I am going and why, and ask him to assign another brother to my duties until vespers. Any word from that girl who waits on the niece of M. le Baron?"

"There are no papers except her passport."

Brother Simon grunted and retraced his steps down the hill, going this time by the road instead of by the ramparts.

Upon reaching the King's Gate, he mounted to the tower and presently reached the room where de Lussan had been bedded. The count, bandaged and pale as the sheets on which he lay, sharply commanded him to fetch writing materials and close the door. Having already provided himself with ink, Brother Simon sat him down at the table, trimmed a quill to his taste and looked for orders to the wounded man.

"Write to M. de Lyunes, in command of the *maréchaussée* in this district, at Avranches. Order him to make ready a coach and six with an escort of four cavaliers, the expense to be charged to my name. Stay! When will ebb tide occur on Friday night next?"

Brother Simon lifted his head and reflected an instant.

"Somewhat before midnight, monsieur."

"This coach and escort will come to the barbican at the South Gate an hour before midnight of Friday night," continued de Lussan. "No lights are to be carried. They will inquire for me at the barbican and

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await my orders. When the letter is written, I will sign it."

BROTHER SIMON, bent forward over his paper, bent his lips as though murmuring words which assuredly were not prayers. Then a sly grin came into his face, and he hurried on. The letter finished, he carried paper and quill to the bedside and de Lussan made shift to sign, though not without a grimace of pain.

"Despatch this tonight without fail Have you any further news for me?"

"None, monsieur—" and the eyes of Simon twinkled malignantly—"except that M. d'Aumont speaks English as well as I do myself, or a little better."

De Lussan stared up at him for a long moment, incredulous.

"Eh? Eh? Impossible! Rodomont knows not a word of English! He understands it a little, but speaks ludicrously."

"I assure you, monsieur, he speaks it perfectly. I was talking with him only a few moments ago."

De Lussan whistled a little. His eyes widened, then narrowed reflectively.

"Also, monsieur," pursued Simon, with a baby-like stare of innocence which might have warned the other man but did not, "I think M. d'Aumont is extremely interested in the niece of M. le Baron. He has been walking with her on the ramparts ever since his return this afternoon, and since she speaks no French, he must have been using his English. *Peste!* If he has an eye for yellow hair, then she has an eye for red. There is heat, monsieur, there is heat! It is easy to perceive that the sins of the flesh will soon be entering this sacred place."

"Silence, you fat bullock!" snarled de Lussan, writhing on his pillows. His dark eyes were beginning to blaze both with fever and with mental fires. "Death of my life, to be helpless at such a moment! What's this about Rodomont? A master of fence, has learned to speak English fluently, ten thousand ——! That's the thing. Look for the mole, look for the mole!"

"Eh, monsieur? You mean our librarian, our little scrivener."

"Fiend fly away with you, no!" roared de Lussan in an access of passion. "The mole under his left ear, Roger was always vain of it! If this man has it not, he is not Roger d'Aumont! Oh, I see it now, all of it!" From his lips broke a sudden frantic oath. "Here is the red-haired man—was with St. Martin—the man with the black-smudged face? What was his name on that passport? Roger, ah, —— take me! Domont! The same name, and there was a look of d'Aumont in his face! Ah, that accursed Canadian! These men have tricked us all, and they're in league with that girl."

His voice died away in panting silence. Brother Simon, who had not missed a word of all this, was shrewd at guessing. He pursed up his lips in a grimace of amazement and sudden comprehension.

"Shall I have him arrested, monsieur?"

"No, fool! He is here, you say? Returned?"

"An hour or more ago."

"Then watch him closely. Look for the mole, and if he has it not, say nothing but let me know. Tell Dom Julien that he is not to be permitted to leave the Mont again. Where is that man St. Martin? Did he return? Have you heard from him?"

"He did not return, monsieur," said Brother Simon. "Baron de Karque mentioned that he had ridden to Caen."

A blasting oath burst from de Lussan.

"Open that letter! Order that man's arrest. A dozen cavaliers out to patrol every road between here and Caen! Quickly!"

Brother Simon returned to the table. He opened the unsealed letter and added the postscript. De Lussan initialed it, and then fell back exhausted with a gesture of dismissal. When the letter had been sealed, Brother Simon left the room. Outside the closed door he paused to wipe sweat from his fat jowl.

"Now, here is a most rascally piece of business all around!" he observed complacently. "My good M. de Lussan is about to carry off this young woman to serve his own carnal desires. Sieur d'Aumont is another man entirely, undoubtedly a spy, which fact I shall verify before dinner. And that accursed Canadian is loose. What he has done, I don't know and don't care. He's one of them at all events.

"Hm! It is decidedly my business to get another letter off with this one, informing the minister of these things. If M. de Lussan escapes the Bastille, he'll be a lucky man! What a blessing I did not order that sleeping potion given him at once. Otherwise I would not have learned all this! As it is, de Lussan will be a scatter-brained

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idiot until Wednesday night at least. He cannot possibly take any action before Thursday. Good! By the end of the week he'll be in disgrace and there'll be a new royal deputy on the scene, and why not one who wears a cassock?"

Brother Simon went his way, chuckling.

Domont, in the meantime, being mindful of the slowly enveloping peril, arranged with Mary Suffolk as to the place and hour of meeting on Sunday night week, then bowed over her hand and slowly ascended toward the Abbey. If nothing went wrong, he would see her every day. Yet there was much to go amiss.

To his untold relief, as he turned the swing of the great stairs leading to the black maw of the Chatelet, he saw the figure of the Mole hurriedly coming down. The misshapen creature scarcely paused to return his greeting, however.

"So you failed to kill the ——, my St. Michel!" said the Mole briefly, his liquid brown eyes anything but merry. "No time to talk! One of the madmen in the Lesser Exile has become violent, and I must fetch the town armorer to iron him. Await me at the west platform in half an hour."

Domont nodded and passed on, seeking his own chamber. He mounted past the ever-locked door of the Nameless Exile, came to his private prison cell, and discovered that it had been very thoroughly searched during his morning's absence. Over his pipe he gazed out at the waters and sands, glittering in the afternoon sunlight, and perplexed worry drew a frown to his face. Suspicion must be aroused by the discovery that he spoke English. In that case, what to do about the letter in his pocket, the sealed letter from the Nameless Exile? There was nowhere to hide it safely.

He resolved at length to give it to the Mole, who was in least danger of them all, and this resolve banished his care. Knocking out his pipe, he stowed it away and betook himself to the west platform.

His way took him by the Great Inner Degree, that massive stairway following the bend of naked rock, mounting gradually by flights and landings between the church and the abbatial buildings, steep walls of stone rising high in air on either hand. And mounting, Domont marveled anew at the indescribable labor of ancient days which had built this pyramid of masonry on an ocean islet. This long climbing way was itself wider than most streets, was crossed overhead by defences, and a covered passage between abbot's rooms and church, while looming far above could be seen the delicate granite lacework of the Marvel. Small wonder that this fortress had never in history been taken.

The top of this tremendous stairway brought him to the south platform. Dumont continued his route by way of the church which he found empty at the moment. He had heard much about the sacred edifice and now, as he set eyes upon it, this monument to medieval and monastic achievement enthralled him.

Far down beneath his feet, crouched against the naked rock, was the ancient church of Carolingian builders. Around and above this was erected the early Norman structure, where Harold, the Saxon, and William of Normandy had knelt side by side in the days before Senlac. Above this, in turn, while preserving the others, now towered the architectural wonder, *par excellence*, of all France, so far beyond all others that it was usually known simply as the Marvel.

The vast extent of the place, with its carvings and pillared arches, was overwhelming. The seven-bayed naves and transept led into the choir and the apse chapels, only finished in the fifteenth century, four hundred years later than the remainder. Overhead opened the great tower, the very summit of the Marvel. Ahead was the semicircular sanctuary, towering high, while below its long windows glimmered the richness of votive offering and sacred service collected here across the ages. In the nave, at the altar of the saint, was the high golden image of St. Michel given by the royal pilgrim Philippe le Bel, and in the transept was the abbey's treasure, a splendor of enamels, gold work, jeweled reliquaries, crowned by the gemmed mitre and the carved pastoral cross, the most beautiful in all France, which had been made for the traitor abbot Robert Jolivet in 1412, him who assisted at the burning of Joan the Maid.

IT WAS with a sigh that Domont turned from the contemplation of these things amid the peace of the dim church, to seek the west platform before its portals. He walked out toward the parapet. There, far out against

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the sea horizon, he could see the blue dots marking the archipelago of Chausey, given as a fief to the monks in 1179, whence had been brought all the granite for this magnificent work. And then, abruptly, he was aware of the Mole shambling rapidly to him across the platform.

"Tell me all that has happened, everything you know, all of it!" exclaimed the Mole abruptly, his large face set in anxious lines. "Now our heads hang loosely indeed, my friend, so leave out nothing. Let the Mole burrow!"

Domont related everything that had chanced since he left the island that morning. He omitted nothing, yet from the Mole came no comment until Domont spoke of his recent meeting with Brother Simon on the ramparts below. Then the little man uttered an ejaculation, sharp and swift.

"Eh? What? What did he say?"

"Why, he tricked me very neatly into speaking English."

"No, no! The sleeping potion for de Lussan—did you see it? Could you describe it?"

"Of course." Domont was astonished by the larger incident being ignored for the lesser and by the Mole's eager excitement. He looked down at those flashing brown eyes, and frowned. "It was a small vial, filled with a greenish liquid."

"That's it, that's it, by the bone of the blessed St. Benoit!" The Mole clapped his hands suddenly, then uttered a low, amazed whistle. "What a devil's game! Look you, we sought that stuff for the madman in the Lesser Exile, but the bottle was gone. And why should fat Simon give it to poor de Lussan, eh?"

"Why indeed? You don't mean that it is poison?"

"No. Here is the explanation, friend Rodomont! The prior of St. Benoit, in St. Malo, has much dealing with the orient, and occasionally sends us vials of this stuff to use on poor idiots or madmen when they cannot be handled otherwise. It is a potent eastern drug called *hachich* or some such word. It puts them into heavy sleep of a day or two, from which they waken without any ability to think or act either violently or coherently for another day or so. I tried some of it myself once, and beheld marvelous visions of hell and paradise and other places. Well, well, to the point! De Lussan will be incapable of any action for some days, we may confidently assume that much. What is clever Simon planning? I smell evil in this, Rodomont. Simon tricked you into speaking English, eh? Then, depend upon it, your head is looser than ever on your neck!"

"If we can stave off any crisis until a week from tomorrow."

"By tomorrow week," said the Mole with emphasis, "I shall be on the rack, you in the wooden cage down below, and the maid no longer a maid, or else we shall be gone. That is very certain.

"But we can't get away before then!"

"Granted, perhaps. All things are possible, though, if God has a hand in them. Now let me think a moment."

The Mole leaned on the parapet, chin on folded arms, and peered out at the long seascape and the Brittany shore to the south. He fell to humming presently, his eyes brightened, and with a half satirical smile he intoned a verse of the hymn of St. Ambroise:

*"Hostem repellat ut saevum*
*Opemque pacis dirigat,*
*Et nostra simul pectora*
*Fides perfecta muniat."*

He swung around with a quick, sharp laugh.

"I have it! That business of the letter was awkward, Rodomont, because of the position of your cell. You should have been two stories below, for I can not reach you where you are. Tomorrow morning after mass, petition the prior to remove you to the room on the second floor of the tower, which happens to be vacant at present. It will be done readily enough. Assign any reason you can think up."

"To what end?" queried Domont, puzzled. "I meant to ask how you had managed that letter exchange. Were you in the room of the Nameless Exile?"

"Was I, indeed!" The Mole chuckled. "We have a game of chess together every night, and sometimes a bottle of wine. Listen! Why should we not play for a big stake, if any?" The brown eyes dilated with eager thought. "Once you are in the chamber below his, I can reach you. The Mole burrows, my friend, burrows far and into strange places! If we are to get away, then, why not take the Nameless Exile with us? He has powerful friends, I assure you, though I do not know who they are. His rescue would put a king's ransom into your hand. Besides, I have a friendship

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and reverence for him. I should like to take him with us."

Domont nodded instantly.

"Agreed. How do you expect to escape, then?"

The other shrugged.

"How does the bird fly?"

"Nonsense." Domont was nettled by this response. "Either you have some scheme or you have none. Which is it?"

"Rodomont, let us be honest together. The Mole faced him with eyes that shimmered and glinted. "You know, and I know even better than you, that we can not endure until Sunday week. Too much is in the brewing, and even now the pot simmers! At any instant, we may lose life or liberty. Simon knows you speak English. You are as good as unmasked already. The girl is already discovered, and only de Lussan's arrogant lust has saved her from arrest, for once arrested by others, he could not touch her. The recommendation has already gone in that I be put to the rack, for my virtues. St. Martin is undoubtedly being hunted along every highway at this moment, or will be by tomorrow. You recognize that these things are so?"

"Of course," said Domont, wondering at the passionate earnestness which filled the words and manner of the little man.

"Good. Now, then, you ask if I have any scheme. And I answer that I have none. But, my friend, I have faith."

"Eh? Faith? in whom?"

"You, myself, destiny! That Nameless Exile may be a king or a pope, I know not. But I do know that he is a holy man, and bestows the blessing of God. I confess, Rodomont, that I do not find God among those walls yonder where the black brethren whine. Sometimes I am almost ashamed to reverence the Blessed Host, knowing what thoughts are rioting in those tonsured pates, and I am quite certain that the Blessed Host is ashamed of such servitors as most of them are. Yet when I ring those bells, my friend, God speaks to me. You will comprehend when I say that I speak to Him then, also. Well, something passes. I do not know what. There is a touch from above, so that sometimes I shed tears as I stand there pulling at the ropes. Tears of pure joy, for the touch of beauty that reaches to me. The mass that they sing down below is a hollow mumble of parrot words, but mine is something else and different. Do you think me a blasphemous fool, my friend?"

Domont nodded a little, his eyes tender.

"I think you are a dear fellow," he said, and smiled.

The Mole bit his lip.

"Ah, the heart of a friend! God is good to me. Well, I have no scheme, but I have this faith in a higher power. Perhaps some inspiration will come to us. Who knows? Let us trust and wait."

"Very well," assented Domont quietly. "And you want me to change my room?"

"Aye. Do that, and you are free of the Mont at night."

"Leave my locked chamber, you mean?"

The Mole nodded, seemed about to speak, then suddenly turned and was gone across the wide platform, and vanished. Domont stared after him in blank astonishment, until, an instant later, he caught sight of a mountainous black bulk. He turned to the fat monk.

"Well, Brother Simon, did you want to speak with me?"

"A trifling matter, M. d'Aumont!" The other chuckled jovially. "I only wanted to say that if you suffer for an extra bottle of wine at any time, slip a word in my ear. You comprehend? On lean days the fare is ferial enough, ha, ha! There are rabbits down yonder in the little wood below us, and not a few birds, and the cook is my very good friend. To eat of such things is undoubtedly a sin, but if you attribute this sin to curiosity alone, it becomes only a venial fault, which is effaced by eating a morsel of blessed bread."

Despite himself, Domont's lips twitched.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "You're a friend in need. This is a wonderful view, Brother Simon. Has this platform a name?"

"It is called Plomb-du-four," said the monk, and pointed down at the abrupt gulf three hundred feet below, where the sea lapped at the rocks. "It was sung by the *trouvère* Benoit de St. More, and was built seven hundred years ago. A jolly leap, monsieur, a jolly leap!"

Smiling, the fat monk passed on. Domont wondered why Brother Simon had looked so hard at his neck.

TO BE CONTINUED

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# Plants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

## THE PASSING TRAIN

I HAD a very strange experience today. The orchard where I have been working is beside a road, and across the road is the railway upon the other side of a fence. While I was at work upon a tree at the edge of the grove I heard a faraway rumble of an approaching train and, stepping from my ladder to the ground, stood to listen to the peculiar music of the engine and the rolling wheels. There is a strange fascination often to me in the noise of a train. A train seems to bring before me a sight again of all the big and little railway stations that I have at one time and another known. I stood beneath the limbs of a tall olive tree, the orchard is bordered by a row of olives, and listened. The air was silent save for the increasing roar and rumble. The olive-blossoms lay in a soft and scenty carpet about my feet, and over the mountains the sun of early morning shone through a haze. A bird began to sing in an orange tree close to me.

As the train drew near I felt that old indescribable urge that comes to me at times; the great longing to be up and going, going anywhere—just to be going. It is the spirit of the pioneer, and the adventurer that is native in the souls of many of us. The train almost in view I took off my hat, as one might do while enthralled by the strains of some most wonderful music. I was quite entranced. The locomotive rattled into my vision, between the olive branches, against the hazy background. I was swept with great longings; a catch taking my breath, and a surge of desire flooding through me. Car by car the train sped by. I longed to leap upon one of the box-cars and to go with the train wherever it might be going. I saw cities, and plains, and valleys through hills, and bridges over rivers; hearing bells and many voices, and seeing smoke and tall chimneys, and spires of many a town. There were ports and havens. The world lay all before me in that moment of time as the first few cars went by. Then there came a car, a flat car, laden with huge blocks of gray granite, and behind it was yet another similarly laden. Then, in my fancy, I saw men who worked with chisels and with hammers, carving granite; seeing also the tombs of the dead.

Here, then, was a lesson for one who would go restless-footed to the ends of the earth. I was subdued, feeling somber, then.

Then there came into view, after several box-cars had passed, a car followed by four more like to it.

Against the hazy background of the distant pasture hills, where cattle contentedly wander all the year, I saw the cattle-cars go by, bearing the doomed creatures to a distant market.

The soul of man will wander forever till it comes to its appointed haven, finding peace at last after many perplexities. The gray granite upright above the sleeping form will be but of a slight significance. The soul will seek onward.

It matters not too much then that one may not follow now the bent of one's earthly wanderings since the soul will not perish?

Man may be imprisoned—a temporary affair. The cattle die.

The train passed from my sight, a man in the caboose waving a cheery hand to me; wishing no doubt that he too might stand in the scent of blossoms beneath green trees upon this sunny morning. A bird whistled shrill near to me.

What do you make of my parable?

I think that one must be content; but not too contented. I think that one must be restless, but not too restless. I think that one must draw from the present beauty all that he may of this present beauty's sweetness. I think that there will come some other day—some day when the soul will travel to ports of a beauty surpassing the beauty of the harbors and cities and havens of the earth for which the pioneering mind of man is wont to crave. The mind is but the wild growth in the nursery upon which the grafter will yet graft a fruiting tree—bringing to perfection, budded upon the growing souls of men, an orchard in which the grafter and orchardist of all skill and wisdom will wander to talk to the trees of his own growing.



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# The LAW of the COSSACK

By Kenneth Malcolm Murray

KORYTOWSKI peered sharply into the thicket, hesitated a moment, then darted around to the other side and, regardless of the briars that tore at his clothing, made a wild sweep at a tiny object that flashed by his head. He missed by a yard. Spinning on his heel, he galloped after it through the brush, swinging his butterfly net like an oar as he leapt ahead, hot on the chase of a giant palamedes.

The butterfly, brilliant as a gypsy dancer, lighted coyly on a branch of wild olive, swaying its wings gently in the warm sunshine, a breathless little gaily attired lady fanning herself after eluding her lover. Korytowski crept up within range, made a sudden lunge, and tripped headlong over a log deep hidden among the grass tufts. Milady Palamedes rose on graceful wings and disappeared into the forest, and Korytowski, rather the worse for wear, clambered to his feet amid an unexpected bellow of laughter. Turning, he beheld a mixed party of Cossacks and Mongols riding by the field.

His eyes narrowed, and as long as the riders were in sight he watched them, missing nothing of their outward appearance, from their shaggy little horses to their long sabers, the rifles slung across their shoulders, and the thick bandoliers of cartridges that crossed over the front of their camel's-hair tunics.

Korytowski himself was an aviator who had lost his nerve. Though no man could accuse him of being yellow. For a long while he had ranked with the bravest; then had come a final, terrific crash, and although he had escaped without a scratch, he knew his flying days were over.

Without explanation he had applied for discharge from the army—he had been serving with the French—and when it came through he had hurried back to the estates in the Ukrain left him by his father. Dull were the days that followed until he remembered the little hunting lodge at Saktlen, on the rocky bank of the Uszyca.

There, less than ten versts from the Bessarabian frontier, he had finally found peace for his shattered nerves. His was a world of books and casual scientific research along aeronautical lines. For his diversion was some of the finest hunting in Russia, through the semi-tropical forests that thrived in the warmth of the not distant Black Sea. Amusement was amply provided by his Rusty cat and Copernicus, the parrot. Garberiscz, an ancient, ham-strung peasant, was his only companion—a man well able to supply his simple needs, doing everything from cooking to cleaning guns with a stolid pleasure that made him invaluable to his master.

As Korytowski made his way through the wood and across the fields he pondered over the sudden appearance of the cavalrymen. That the Bolsheviki were sweeping the Poles back in the north, he had heard. But he



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had not known until that moment that they had been successful in the south as well.

Not that it made any great difference to him; he was neither Pole nor Bolo, but Ukrainian. Yet he could not help but wonder what the advent of the wild tribesmen would mean to the peace and quiet of Saktlen; troops, especially mounted troops, seldom added to the beauty of the various little towns where they found themselves quartered.

Hastening his steps, the ex-pilot soon came to his tiny lodge perched high up on the river bank. There he found things in a most unusual state of excitement—his papers were strewn about the floor, books had been pulled from the shelves and lay sprawled upon table and chairs, Copernicus was squawking and swearing through the bars of his cage.

Rusty's tail resembled a miniature black balloon, and Garberiscz was so thoroughly frightened that he was unable to speak a word in explanation.

Korytowski took in the situation at a glance.

"The Mongols?" he asked, indicating the disorder of the room.

"May the gods have mercy on us, sir," stammered Garberiscz, "it was Bohdan himself!"

"Bohdan—!"

It was the man who, with his picked corps of Cossacks and Mongols—thirty thousand of the wildest riders and most terrible sabermen in all the Russias—alone massacred Denniken's army; whose personal cruelty and that of his faithful, half-savage cavalry spelt terror throughout Vholinia—Bohdan, the very name was electric! Korytowski paled visibly.

"What brought him to this house?" he asked.

"I know not," answered Garberiscz, wringing his hands. "He said you were a spy—a Polish spy—"

"He is a fool!" said Korytowski, angrily. "Come, where is this crazy Cossack quartered?"

"Quartered? Why in the church, of course. That is the only frame building in the village, and he has already established his Chesviachika, his Cheka, there. But—"

"But what?"

"Don't go there, sir. Please don't think of going there—!"

"And, pray, why not?"

"Bohdan will kill you—he will torture you first, then tell you that he has decided to let you go, and then shoot you in the back as you go out the door! Please, sir—!"

"Foolishness! What reason has he to torture me?"

"He has already done that to two men and one woman from the village—and he is convinced that you are a spy even now!"

Korytowski frowned.

But before he could decide what was the best course to pursue, there came the crunching of heels on the gravel path, and Bohdan strode on to the porch accompanied by four of his men. For an instant he hesitated at the door, a stocky, somewhat bow-legged, dynamic force whose very presence threw a spell over the place, silencing even the parrot as his sharp black eyes noted every object in the room.

"MAY I come in?" The voice was modulated, almost gentle.

Korytowski drew a quick breath.

"You have done so once, and—" he added, growing a trifle angry at the sheer ease of the man, "—rather made yourself at home, I should say."

The Cossack entered and crossed the room to the wide bay-window that looked out over the river.

"Wonderful view—!" he remarked, slapping his copper-tipped quirt against the skirt of his long outer garment.

Korytowski watched him anxiously, noting with interest the colt-skin astrakhan set at a rakish angle on the decidedly well shaped head, the high waistline trimly belted and from which hung an extremely heavy yataghan, a guardless, in-curved Turkish sword, in place of the usual sabre.

"Have you really come to see my view?" Korytowski had somewhat regained his composure.

"Yes," was the prompt reply, "and I consider myself well repaid."

"I am pleased—" said Korytowski, bowing slightly but watching the Cossack's poise as he turned from the window. "Had you not frightened my servant so badly on your first visit I might offer you some refreshments, but—"

"It is of small matter," said Bohdan, casually. "By the way, Pan Korytowski, they tell me you are not only a pilot but somewhat of an aeronautical engineer as

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well. Is that true?" He came closer and half seated himself on the corner of the table as he spoke.

"And who, sir, was good enough to tell you that?"

For a second the Cossack did not reply, his eyes steeling perceptibly. Then his words came slowly, decisively.

"That, also, is of no matter."

Korytowski shrugged.

"Of course I am a pilot. But why do you ask?"

Bohdan smiled. "That is better. And I shall be as frank—"

He drew a large, Kremlin enameled cigaret-case from a breast pocket, opened it and selected a cigaret with some care, then proffered one to the Ukrainian.

"Thank you, no."

Bohdan took a match from the table, struck it upon his boot-heel, and puffed deeply. Abruptly he recommenced speaking.

"As you may or may not know, we are badly hampered by the unceasing activities of the Polish aeroplanes—"

He stopped to slip the cigaret-case into his pocket.

Korytowski started to reply, but the Cossack interrupted him with a quick motion of his hand.

"Yes, yes, I know. We have plenty of machines—good, new aeroplanes—but we have no pilots save a handful of young German mercenaries who do nothing but fly from town to town and visit the cafés and brothels." He scowled darkly. "I want some one to take hold of the situation and whip a few good pilots into shape, send them out with the main body of my cavalry, and keep them flying day and night, —— them!"

Bohdan had risen to his feet and was emphasizing his words by pounding the heel of his yataghan upon the carpet.

"And so you've come to me," asked Korytowski, "thinking I might be interested?"

"Interested? H'm, well yes, put it that way if you like—!"

"You honor me. But I can answer you at once—no! Bolshevism, as a cause, does not appeal to me. Besides, I have given up all interest in the actual practice of aviation—for a number of good and sufficient reasons."

"One moment, Pan Korytowski," said Bohdan, briskly. "You seem to be losing sight of the fact that you are under grave suspicion of being in the pay of Poland—in fact," he added, "I know full well that you are, and I shall take extremely good care to remedy that fault, one way or another, before I leave Saktlen!"

Korytowski raised his head spiritedly.

"That, sir, is not only unfair but untrue. I shall appeal—"

"Bah! Appeal to what? I am now the law from Kiev to the Black Sea and from Olgopol west to the furthest reach of my farthest patrols!"

"That may be," shrugged Korytowski, "but all the law in the world cannot make a pilot fly if he will not—!"

"No, of course you have the alternative—" Bohdan smiled with meaning.

"Of what?"

"Listen to me, Korytowski! You are a fool! Can you not see that I shall drop all further investigation if you take over my aviation, and that if you refuse I shall simply put the case in the hands of the Cheka?"

"But you have no case against me—I have had nothing to do with either side!"

Bohdan cracked his quirt angrily. "Ass! Do you not understand that my men collected enough evidence this morning to hang you twice over, yes, and have you drawn and quartered besides—!"

"Forgery!" exclaimed the Ukrainian.

"Oh, may the blood of a dog be upon you! Korytowski, you may consider yourself under arrest." Bohdan turned away disgustedly. At the door he stopped and looked back.

"Forgery or not, the fact remains that the Cheka has got a case against you. But look you, I shall put you upon stringent parole for awhile. Do not under any consideration attempt to leave the village—and come to me as soon as you can see your way clear to accept my offer—unless," he added slowly "—unless you are called first to appear before the Cheka! Think it over." And nodding to his men, he strode off among the trees.

For a long moment Korytowski stood without moving a muscle. Then Copernicus craned his neck and, mimicking the Cossack's voice, solemnly said, "Cheka!" and the man started violently.

"Come, this will never do," he mused, noticing that his fingers were trembling.

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"Garberiscz! Enter and help me straighten up this place—it's not exactly airworthy." he added, glancing around.

But the task proved greater than he anticipated, and dusk fell before the last book had been found and put in its proper place. Not all of the papers were there, he saw. Garberiscz prepared the evening meal, and Korytowski sat long over the little table on the porch, enjoying the fragrant coffee, watching the darkness creep slowly through the forest, the stars sparkling one by one, with an intensity of feeling greater than he had ever felt.

It was, perhaps, the gloomy foreboding of imprisonment and death that made him more vividly aware of the love of freedom that now weighed like a ball of lead in his chest. Moments had become precious, jeweled instants to be snatched from out the path of an approaching Nemesis, impressed in the memory, stored away as the fragrance of a rose is stored against the coming of inexorable winter. Korytowski bowed his head in his hands.

DAY followed night, and again, and again, cloud-like, slow to the watcher, yet more swiftly than the half-dazed man was aware.

Then a Mongol rode up to his door.

Korytowski stood watching the play of the bright morning sunlight upon the silver fittings on his saddle and bridle, nodding when the slant-eyed rider pronounced his name, smiled at the semi-musical lilt in the man's voice, took the paper solemnly proffered.

Long after the fellow had ridden away he stood holding the letter. That it was from Bohdan he knew, or the Mongol had not been the carrier; its contents he guessed, and it was with a distinct sense of relief that he realized he had at last been called.

Mechanically he broke the seal and confirmed his knowledge. It was true. The small, thick-set writing stated tersely that he was to present himself before the Chesviachika at eleven o'clock sharp. Korytowski glanced at his watch. It was ten. One hour more. For the thousandth time he considered flight, but as always he put the idea from him with a gesture—as well try to escape the very air he breathed! Bohdan was a Cossack.

With a cold sensation in the pit of his stomach, Korytowski went to his desk and began to write. In substance it was a statement of his final will and command, and it provided mostly for the future welfare of his faithful servant, gaudy Copernicus, and Rusty the Silent. Blotting the sheet, he folded it and sealed the edges. Twenty minutes had fled.

"Garberiscz!"

The old peasant appeared, cap in hand, in the doorway. He, too, had seen the coming of the Mongol, and had guessed the meaning of the message.

"Garberiscz, I am going for a little walk—"

The old man could only nod.

"But these are troublous times—"

The peasant blinked hard.

"The most unexpected could readily happen—I have prepared a letter. Should I fail to return by this time tomorrow, open it and do as I have stated."

Garberiscz took the folded square of paper, but made no move to go. With silent anguish he watched his master as he stroked Rusty, making him arch his back ecstatically. Copernicus was permitted to peck at his finger, gurgling inarticulately. Each book and article of furniture received its farewell glance.

Garberiscz finally managed to speak.

"I—I cleaned your sabre—won't you wear it, sir?" he stammered.

"My saber!" Korytowski looked at him, a little smile quirking the corners of his mouth. "H'm, have you ever seen me wear it when I was simply going for a little stroll?"

"But—"

"Fiddlesticks! I'm only going for a stroll, I tell you. Besides, of what avail is a sabre to a man on foot should he, let us say, be attacked by men on horses? No, Garberiscz, I sha'n't bother, thanks."

He gently patted the old man's shoulder, then turned abruptly and strode out the door leaving Garberiscz staring dumbly at the empty room.

IT WAS but a short walk to the village, and Korytowski soon came to the lower end of the wide road that separated the two little rows of thatch-roofed peasant hutches. He hesitated. It would have been better, perhaps, to have avoided passing through the town. He had many friends among the peasants—quiet, iron-backed fellows and



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their sturdy women-folk—before whom it would be particularly terrible to show any signs of the fear that gripped at his throat.

But Saktlen seemed deserted save for a few barn fowls that strutted in and out of the little yards, pecking at insects on the roadside; and the few head of cattle that grazed peacefully around the impromptu cavalry-paddock staked out on the broad plateau beyond.

He moved on tentatively, ready to turn quickly and go round outside the town at the first sight of a human being. Strong within him was the sense of being watched by more than one pair of eyes. But it never occurred to him that the people might have heard of his arrest and were keeping within doors out of deference to his misfortune—to him it was the men of Bohdan who were ever spying upon him, glorying in his miserable apprehension.

A low, throaty cry caught his attention, and he turned to see a little child kneeling beside the body of a man. Drawing closer, he realized that it was one of the old widowers of the village, lying dead, horribly mutilated, upon his own door-step. The child was a tiny tot he had saved and adopted when the river had risen and swept away the babe's home and her parents.

Now the poor little girl-creature was alone again. Korytowski sadly stroked her head, but she would not leave the threshold where she had once found shelter. Korytowski shuddered. His impulse had been to take the baby home with him—then he realized that he was not going home—no, he was not going in that direction, he was going up the road, not down. High overhead circled three bronzy-black vultures. He called softly to them.

"Here is one for you—" He pointed toward the body on the door-slab. Then he lightly tapped his own chest with his forefinger—"and here is another. But you will have to wait a little—just a little—"

Up ahead, a hundred yards or so beyond the last low-eaved building, the blacksmith's shop, stood the gaunt frame structure that was the Cheka headquarters, the church, glaringly white in the sun. Korytowski drew a quick breath. But whatever resolution he might have gained was swept away by the savory odors that came from a near-by cottage.

Cossacks were quartered there, and their midday meal was to be mutton—mutton stewed with vegetables!

He realized with some surprize that he was famished—never in his life had he been so hungry, and never had he been less likely to eat another meal. He moistened his dry lips with a drier tongue, and went on. Not that he thought for a moment that Bohdan's tribunes would kill him outright. Far from it. Modern surgery, minus anesthetics, had placed far too many shining new instruments of torture in their hands for them to readily permit anything as merciful as quick death.

At the same time, he was sufficiently aware of his own physical and nervous condition to know that he would quickly succumb to any unreasonable pain, and he was, in a way, proportionately thankful. Though he grew even more pale at the thought of a surgeon's saw grating upon live bone.

The stinging clang of an anvil rang out from the blacksmith's shop, and as he drew near, the high-pitched shriek of steel filing steel made his blood run cold.

A strong metallic taste came into his mouth. He shuddered, involuntarily hastening his steps, his head averted from the acrid smell of burning horsehair—and he failed to see Bohdan standing just inside the doorway, watching him with a slight smile of amusement.

A little way beyond stood the most perfect specimen of horseflesh that had ever come into Saktlen. For an instant Korytowski was almost able to forget the doom awaiting him in his sheer admiration for the beautiful creature whose long, fine-haired mane rippled in the breeze as she cropped the grass-plot. Her plump, round barrel and dainty legs proclaimed the pure Arabian, and the brilliant saddle-trappings—Bohdan! He started at the thought of that name, and was about to pass on when the mare suddenly shied back to the end of her halter and stood with eyes and nostrils dilated in fear, trembling violently in every limb. He looked at her in surprize. Horses were not usually afraid of him. Then from the corner of his eyes he caught a slight glimmer of movement in the grass just a few feet away.

Going close, he found a small, grey horned viper moving slowly and malignantly toward the mare, its white and yellow striping nauseatingly resembling the gangrenous flesh of the dead. Impulsively he

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sprang forward and ground his heel into its head until there was no further chance of its harming any one. His lip curled with revulsion as he kicked it aside and, after a word or two to soothe the mare, he moved on toward the church, unconsciously comparing the men within it to a nest of vipers.

BOHDAN had watched his every move, and although the smile was gone from his lips, he made no move to leave the doorway until Korytowski was climbing the steps of the church. Then he strode forward and laid his hand on the arching neck of his mare, calming her almost instantly.

His eyes searched the ground until he found the reason for her excitement, and peering down, he recognized the Syrian horse-killer. A slow, angry curse hissed through his teeth. But after a moment he turned away, as if to more interesting thoughts and, striding heavily toward the Cheka headquarters, soon mounted the steps.

Korytowski was standing uncomfortably in the vestibule, vainly endeavoring to dry the clammy sweat from the palms of his hands with a handkerchief. The Cossack looked him over from head to foot. At the end of his cruel survey his suggestive smile again returned.

"So, my friend, you received the message?"

Korytowski nodded, trying his best to avoid hearing the dismal moans that sounded behind the closed inner doors.

"Good! And now tell me, I suppose you have decided to quit dealing with those —— Poles and accept my offer? I need you," he added, gravely.

Korytowski's jaw set in a firm line, and a slight color came into his face.

"Sir, I can only repeat that I have never had any dealings whatsoever with either the Poles or the Bolsheviki. And as for my in any way aiding the cause of Bolshevism, I must say that had I ever had the slightest intention of doing so—and I had not—the sounds coming from behind those doors would be more than enough to prevent me!"

Bohdan's features became so tense that they appeared almost haggard. His teeth came together with the click of a vise. For an instant he seemed beyond the power of speech.

At that moment the inner doors swung back, and two cavalrymen came out dragging the whimpering remains of a man—a few blood-soaked bandages hanging where his lower jaw should have been. Korytowski again went as pale as a sheet. He knew that Bodhan was watching him keenly, and he knew that a thin film of cold sweat was upon his own forehead. But he held his ground. The Cossack gave him plenty of time to let the meaning of the gruesome sight sink in. And then, in a low voice, he spoke.

"Remember—you, too, are about to be tried for espionage, and by that same court!" He pointed impressively toward the interior of the church, the doors to which still stood ajar. "Are you absolutely sure of your decision?"

Korytowski nodded his head just once. "Absolutely—! You will please consider that final!" His lips were so cold and stiff that he could barely enunciate the words.

"Blood of a cholera dog!" growled Bohdan. "And you are the only man in the Ukraina whom I could possibly trust!"

Thoughtfully he stared at the toe of his boot, remaining silent for a long time. The two men in the doorway smoked and chatted, laughing at the poor wretch they had thrust down the steps and who had gathered himself up and was staggering homeward.

"You see," said Bohdan, at last, evidently speaking against his will. "I am a south-Dnieper Cossack, and it is a law of my people that we must give a deed for a deed, a life for a life—and a horse before a man on any day. You saved my Araby mare from the viper—enough! Always I shall watch you and try to trip you into my power. But now—Ivan!" He called to one of the two at the door. "Ivan, pass the word that this man is to go free!"

Korytowski gasped, reeled and crashed, unconscious, upon the floor of the vestibule.

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# The REFUGEES

## A Complete Novelette

by T. S. Stribling

*Author of "Web of the Sun," "Fombombo," etc.*

HERR KAREL HEINSIUS, police inspector of Curacao, Dutch West Indies, sat glancing first at the passenger list of the incoming Dutch steamer *Vollendam* and then through his window at the storm signal flying from the customs house staff. And the inspector saw a sardonic fitness in the fact that the barometer should fall on precisely the forenoon when the noted—not to use the vile, but more exact term "notorious"—Cesar Pompalone, deposed dictator of Venezuela, landed in the harbor of Willemstad.

Half an hour after the "Magnificent" Pompalone came ashore, one of Hensius' men telephoned that the ex-dictator had lodged in the Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda, and Heinsius instructed his informant to remain at the hotel until the refugee president shipped north.

Inspector Heinsius hoped, but did not expect, that this incident would end his relations with the Magnificent Pompalone. It was the inspector's duty to see that the ex-dictator did ship north. Deposed presidents flying out of Venezuela are a fairly ordinary phenomenon in the West Indies; and there is an informal international agreement among the powers that own these islands, that once a dictator leaves Venezuela he must not be allowed to return. All the rest of the world is open to the fugitive's business or pleasure, but not Venezuela. His native land he must never see again.

The reason for this harsh and apparently unjust mandate is simple. All those powers who own West Indian islands also possess large commercial interests in Venezuela. The flight of a dictator means the end of a revolution and more stable business conditions, but the return of an ex-dictator marks the beginning of a new revolt and a new series of financial disturbances. Therefore, by this informal agreement, the road of dictators out of Venezuela is devoted exclusively to one-way traffic.

Not until the following day did the Magnificent Pompalone obtrude himself again on Herr Heinsius' attention. The inspector was eating breakfast, which occurs in Curacao from twelve to one o'clock, when the telephone called the inspector to come at once to the Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda.

The officer immediately imagined a clash between his agent and the Venezuelan. He hurried into his motor and then down the white street between the gaily painted Dutch houses of Willemstad. As he drove, he pondered what he would do with the Magnificent Pompalone; put him in the *quartel* there in Willemstad, ship him north, willy nilly, to New York where the American secret service would keep him safely away from Venezuela, transport him to London— Back of this pondering he knew that he would ship his man on the first steamer out, no matter where it sailed.



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Still, of course the fellow had certain selective rights—

A few minutes later the inspector was motoring across the long pontoon bridge that connects Otrabanda on one side of the sea-canal to Willemstad on the other. At a pier a hundred yards away lay the *Vollendam*, disgorging her hold of Dutch products to be reshipped to South and Central American ports. On the rising wind came the smell of shipping and the tang of the sea. Inspector Heinsius thought ruefully that his two storms were rising together.

The Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda is a large hostelry, brightly painted in reds and greens. This building, and indeed the whole Dutch city, gave the impression of having been constructed out of big, gay toy blocks for overgrown children.

Around the entrance of the hotel was a rabble of dirty enough negroes who had been attracted to the place by that nose for the exciting and the uncanny which the West Indian negro possesses to a degree.

As the motor drove up, the hotel physician, Dr. Van Maasdyk, appeared on the piazza and made a gesture of relief at seeing the inspector. Heinsius jumped out and ran up the steps, speculating what trouble his man had had with the Venezuelan. The sight of such a crowd suggested a fight.

"Has anything happened to Barneveldt?" he asked the physician quickly.

"Not to Barneveldt, to Señor Grillet, the proprietor."

Heinsius was surprized.

"What's the matter with Grillet?"

"He is dead," said Van Maasdyk, with excited brevity. "Has been dead for an hour at least. We found him a few minutes ago."

"There was no fight, no disturbances?" queried the inspector, trying to orient his ideas to this new phase of things.

"Nothing of the sort. He was found in his study. I gave the body a cursory examination and was about to pronounce it heart failure, but—" He hesitated.

"But what, Herr Doctor?"

"Well, there was a peculiar twist to our old friend's death—but you will see. We left the body sitting at the table exactly as we found it. I thought—"

The two men were now entering the lobby of the Hotel Saragossa where a number of guests of half a dozen different nationalities were assembled. The doctor and the officer were too close to the group to continue their remarks.

Barneveldt, the inspector's man, had corralled the whole hotel in the lobby, and the guests were talking in a low babel about the proprietor's sudden death. An American was saying in an aggrieved tone:

"It's a —— shame we can't go in and look at the body. I paid my three bucks a day here, and they told me it included everything."

From the upper story came the sound of a woman's weeping. Somebody in the crowd whispered—

"There's the inspector now."

A glance over the lobby showed Heinsius the squarely built form and aggressive olive face of a man whom he knew instantly must be the Magnificent Pompalone.

Renewed suspicion, entirely unfounded now, floated through the inspector's head, that if any foul play had been dealt to Señor Grillet somehow this Venezuelan was at the bottom of it. He wondered for an instant what possible connection there could be between the flying president of Venezuela and a simple tavern keeper in Curacao. The next moment he said above the subdued excitement of the guests, first in English, then in Spanish:

"Gentlemen, Señores, may I request that none of you leave the hotel until I finish my investigations. Her Majesty's government will appreciate this courtesy."

He bowed to the lobby in general; a number of citizens bowed in return. The American grumbled *sotto voce*—

"Courtesy ——, if we try to go out we'll get pinched."

On the second floor the inspector and the doctor were met by Hortensia Grillet, daughter of the deceased man, a tall olive-tinted girl who showed clearly her Latin extraction, although she wore the usual apron and cap of the a Dutch *mevrouw*. As a last Dutch touch the girl had a dust-rag in her hand.

"Which room, Hortensia?" asked Van Maasdyk, for the doors opening into the upper hallway were confusing.

Hortensia, still sobbing, pointed to a door and then turned away in a renewed burst of grief. The physician murmured some word of consolation to the girl and the two men entered the study.

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INSTEAD of any ghastly effect such as Herr Heinsius had anticipated, the proprietor of the Saragossa Hotel might have been asleep in his study with his head leaning over on his arms on his greenheart table, save that he sat too still. Around the walls of the room ranged book-cases of the same cool-colored hardwood. On the floor were rare Peruvian llama-wool blankets used as rugs.

The inspector stood looking about the library from the doorway.

"You mentioned something unusual, Herr Doctor, something that aroused your suspicions—"

Dr. Maasdyk moved silently across the Peruvian rugs and touched a yellowed photograph which lay at the hand of the dead man.

"It's this, I'd like you to look at it."

Herr Heinsius came over and regarded it attentively. It was the picture of a young and extremely pretty Latin American woman, and the photographer's signature bore the address of Caracas. Written in a fine old hand in faded letters was the name,

Ana Sixto y Carrera, 1902.

A resemblance between the woman in the picture and the girl he had seen weeping in the hall caused the inspector to remark—

"That must have been Grillet's wife, Hortensia's mother."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the doctor. "Now, look here! This is why I telephoned you."

He turned the picture over and showed on its back in the same faded letters—

"Account of 12 *de Agosto* 1906."

And immediately beneath this in fresh blue ink was the entry,

"Account settled 5 *de Enero*, 1925."

Beside the photograph, where it had dropped from Señor Grillet's fingers, lay a fountain pen making a little blue spot on the blotter where its point touched.

The two men stood looking at each other thoughtfully in the presence of the dead man and this entry, the last he had ever made in life, with its faint suggestion of mystery and bygone drama.

"If it hadn't been for that," explained the doctor, "I should have attributed his death to heart failure, without hesitation."

Heinsius nodded.

"There is nothing about the appearance of the body that suggests an unnatural death?"

"Nothing at all, his end evidently came as peacefully as sleep. But the photograph suggests that he realized his end had come."

"Nineteen hundred and six—that was only a year or two before Señor Grillet came to Curacao and bought this hotel, was it not?"

Van Maasdyk smoothed his whiskers.

"He came here, I believe, about nineteen hundred and five or six. Hortensia, I remember was about three years old, for I attended her during an attack of fever."

"Sixto y Carrera," repeated the inspector. "That must have been this woman's name after her marriage with some man by the name of Sixto; then Grillet's removal from Caracas to this island—Let me talk to Hortensia, Doctor."

The two men reentered the hallway and found the girl still sobbing, and wiping her eyes with the back of her wrist to avoid getting the dust-cloth in her face.

"Fraulein," began the inspector, "have you any memory of your early life, where you were and what you did as a child?"

"I have always lived here, Herr Inspector."

"Do you remember your mother?"

"She died when I was born, Herr Inspector, this—this leaves me all alone." And the girl began sobbing afresh.

The two men glanced at each other and the inspector changed the direction of his queries.

"Have you been in this upper story all morning, Hortensia?"

"Coming and going, Mynherr."

"Was your father up here too?"

"He came and went as usual, Mynherr."

"Did he seem in good health?"

"He was never any other way, Herr Heinsius; in fact he seemed more lively than usual this morning. I mean more in a rush, more excited—"

The girl burst out weeping again as she talked of her father.

"There, there, Hortensia, I remember when my own father died —"

"Oh, Herr Inspector!" sobbed Hortensia. "You had nothing on your heart. Just an hour before my poor father died, I—I quarreled with him! Oh, if I had only

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known, Herr Heinsius! I can't endure it! I can never tell him how sorry I am!"

"Poor child, I am sure it amounted to nothing."

"But—but it was the first time he ever spoke sharply to me in all my life! He was carrying breakfast to the room of Señor Pompalone and Señor Afanador."

"What did you quarrel about, my poor Hortensia?"

"The wine. He had been down in the cellar after some very fine wine. He said they were going to have a rare breakfast together."

The inspector's attention veered a little from his sympathy to the story the girl was telling.

"They? Who, Hortensia? Señor Pompalone and Señor Afanador?"

"They and my father. He meant to eat with them; they were countrymen of his. And he was coming up the stairs with three bottles of rare old wine, and I took them, meaning to rub the cobwebs from them, when my father cried out, '*Caramba*, Hortensia, you are as stupid as the Dutch! Don't you realize that cobwebs grace a wine bottle as pearls did the neck of your beautiful mother?' But I said, 'Father, it is so dirty!' And he said, 'Attend to your rooms, and let me alone!' "

Inspector Heinsius was now engrossed in the girl's narrative.

"So your father went on and ate with his guests?"

"Yes Mynherr, he always showed honor to any of his own countrymen."

"I see. Will you please show us the room these men occupied, Hortensia?"

The girl was a little unwilling.

"I haven't cleaned away the breakfast things yet, Herr Heinsius."

"That's all right. I've seen breakfast things before; just show us the room."

A LITTLE farther down the hall the girl opened a door and displayed an unmade room, with the leavings of a breakfast on a little center table. Evidently it had been, as Hortensia suggested, a rather finer breakfast than usual. On the plates were the remains of a sea-turtle steak, broiled flying fish, a salad of alligator pears, three bottles of wine, some grafted mangoes from Trinidad, and the inevitable wine glasses, coffee cups and tiny liqueur glasses of Curacao.

The inspector glanced around and saw the salver on which the things had been brought. He picked it up and began rearranging the dishes on it.

"May I ask you to open that window-screen a moment, Herr Doctor?" he requested.

"*Caramba*, you're not going to dump all this out the window!" cried the medico.

"I'll set it out of the way a moment while we look around."

The doctor swung open the screen and the inspector placed the tray on the window sill inside the bars. Then he went to the door again and called the girl. When she appeared with her red eyes he asked in a lowered tone—

"Hortensia, when your father brought in this breakfast did he and his guests eat immediately?"

"Yes, Mynherr," gasped the girl, about to weep again.

The inspector frowned thoughtfully. "You are sure your father remained in this room from the very moment he brought in the tray till the meal was eaten?"

The girl evidently tried to remember, then said doubtfully—

"I—I think he did." And then exclaimed, "Oh, look, the screen's open; the room will get full of flies!"

"Yes, I opened it—and your father was not called out?"

"Yes, he was," recalled Hortensia, still looking at the open screen. "Our negro boy, Zubio, came up and wanted a special wine for one of the Americans down stairs; father had to go and get it for him."

"So your father left his tray in this room and went back to get wine for the American; then he came back up and had his breakfast?"

"Yes, Mynherr."

"Very well; thank you, Hortensia."

Heinsius turned back to the window, followed by the physician.

Here the officer stood looking over the tray of leavings. A butterfly was unfurling its tube into the liqueur glass while a swarm of flies were already at the fish and the fruit. A bumble-bee buzzed away at the men's approach. In one wine-glass and on the neck of one wine bottle, lay half a dozen dead house flies, two or three bees and one of those curiously marked "89" butterflies which are found in the West Indies.

The inspector studied these dead insects

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and nodded; then he said to Van Maasdyk with a certain professional pride in his voice:

"You see, Doctor, this is a rude, but fairly effective test for poison. No doubt Cesar Pompalone dropped something in his host's bottle when he left the room for a moment."

Dr. Van Maasdyk stared at the inspector.

"But Herr Heinsius—Pompalone, the ex-dictator of Venezuela—what could he have against a poor tavern keeper in Curacao?"

The inspector lifted his hands.

"I should hazard that Hortensia's mother was not Señor Grillet's wife. The photograph suggests it. The name on the photograph was Sixto—but that's a mere guess; the trial jury will have to search out the motive if they want any. I don't. I'll go down and arrest the two men. You can bring this wine-glass and bottle as evidence."

Van Maasdyk moved in the tray, closed the screen, picked up the glass and bottle, and followed the inspector downstairs.

"We'll have to keep this from Hortensia as long as we can, Heinsius," he cautioned; "at least until after the shock of her father's death."

A little later the two men came down the stairs into the lobby under the inquiring glances of the guests of the hotel. The murmuring conversation which had been going on ceased, and the group in the lobby tried to read the officer's conclusion in his face.

So pronounced was this scrutiny that the inspector who was by nature a courteous man, lifted his hand to the group, then descended into their midst and walked over to the powerful and picturesque figure of the Magnificent Pompalone, who stood somewhat withdrawn from the other patrons of the establishment.

The inspector went to the ex-dictator's side and spoke in an undertone:

"Pardon me, Señor Pompalone, but may I ask you to come with me for a moment to my office in Leidenstraat. I would like to ask you some questions."

The refugee president looked intently at the officer.

"Couldn't you ask your questions here, Señor Inspector?" he inquired in English.

"I might. Didn't Señor Grillet take breakfast with you in your room about two hours ago?"

"He did."

"I have the wine left in his bottle and glass. I have evidence that suggests it has been poisoned. Until we can prove that the wine is harmless, or that you personally did not tamper with it, I will have to hold you under arrest pending the investigation of the death of Señor Grillet."

The ex-dictator straightened and stared in cold astonishment, first at the inspector and then around the lobby, until his eyes rested on his traveling companion, Señor Afanador.

"Señor Inspector," he asked, "do you consider it possible that I, a fugitive from my own country, would be so mad as to further complicate my already harassed flight by committing a murder in the first safe port I reached?"

The crowd gathered around officer and prisoner at this remarkable charge and declaration.

"But I found poisoned wine left on your breakfast table, Señor Pompalone, where Grillet had eaten."

"Then I ask would I have been so childish as to keep the remains of the poison in my room? I am not a child. Besides what motive would I have to murder the first man who took me in?"

"I can't go into your motive here, Señor Pompalone."

"*Ca!* Then you have discovered a motive?"

"I suspect one. It has something to do with a woman, with a Señora Sixto."

The inspector peered at the ex-dictator sharply.

"A Señora Sixto," repeated the Venezuelan with an uninformed expression.

He stood ruminating on the name, "Sixto—Sixto—" which apparently yielded him nothing at all. Again he glanced at his companion Afanador. Then he said:

"You must realize, Señor Inspector, I am here in Curacao on an important mission. I must frame my defense as quickly as possible. May I have a sample of the poisoned wine?"

Van Maasdyk instantly poured a little into the glass and offered it to the dictator.

"Now will some one bring me a piece of shell, conch, oyster, any sort of shell."

Heinsius motioned to his man Barneveldt, who left the lobby and in a few moments returned with a piece of abalone. The dictator dipped the shell into the wine several times, watching the reaction closely. Presently the pearly tint of the nacre turned a

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cream color which later strengthened into a yellow.

"Señores," he said, looking at the yellowed shell, "this is a test I have made at frequent intervals during my presidency of Venezuela. In fact, as President of my country, I formed the habit of feeding to a cat or dog a little of all the food I meant to eat, and then awaiting results. This poison I could not test in that manner because it can be so timed that it will have no effect from one to twenty-four hours, and then it will act instantly and fatally. This is a poison obtained from the Orinocan Indians, and is called 'Las Ojas de la Culebra.' "

"Are you admitting your guilt?" asked the inspector.

"Not at all, Señor Inspector, establishing my innocence. I have had so many attempts made on my life, I feel this was also directed at me and went astray."

"Who do you think it was, Señor Pompalone?" inquired the inspector.

"I have a theory which I prefer not to state openly, but I would like to make a request of this group of *caballeroes*."

He turned toward the lobby.

"Certainly, anything you please."

"GENTLEMEN," said the ex-dictator, lifting his voice a trifle, "as you see, I am about to be placed under arrest here in Curacao, and will not be free to construct my own defense. Now, when this group of travelers are dispersed, which will be within a day or two, my defense will be impossible to make, for naturally some one in this hotel used this poison. So, if it is to be done at all, it must be done at once. Now, I ask, if there is any criminologist, secret service man or a trained investigator in any line in this hotel, would he oblige a fellow traveler by aiding him in freeing himself. I would greatly appreciate it and would reward him well."

"Why don't you hire a lawyer here in the city?" suggested the inspector.

"Because I don't want a man who can quibble over evidence. I want an investigator who can produce absolute evidence."

The group of travelers stared at this strange request. Presently one of the Americans said—

"I'll have a shot at it, Mr. Pompalone. I'm a great reader of detective stories, I think I know the methods by which—"

The ex-dictator glanced at the fellow.

"What is your profession?"

"I am a commercial traveler, I sell soap."

"You sell soap in the West Indies?"

"That's my occupation," repeated the salesman, a little curtly.

"Then I am afraid you lack the reasoning faculty if you are trying to sell soap in the West Indies—is there any one else?"

There was a cavalier humor about this which gained the sympathy of the crowd. Another man, a smallish dark-eyed gentleman of a certain academic appearance, spoke up from the group.

"If you are really innocent, Señor Pompalone," he stated crisply, "I can demonstrate that scientifically in about thirty minutes, but if you are not really innocent I would do you more harm than good."

"That's splendid, splendid, if you can make your word good. Are you a criminologist, señor?"

"No, I am an instructor in psychology. My name is Poggioli."

"Are you from an Italian university?"

"No, I am an American of Italian parentage. I teach in the Ohio State University. I am taking my sabbatical year. To get back to my proof of your innocence, I can demonstrate it very simply."

"How do you do it?"

"By giving you scopothalamin and simply asking you the question, 'Did you poison Señor Grillet?' If you did you will say so; if you did not you will say you did not. The drug deadens all sense of caution."

The inspector spoke up.

"We don't know any such drug as that in our criminal practice here in Curacao."

"I am aware of that," said Poggioli with the slight acerbity of a college instructor toward a forward undergraduate. "I am simply explaining a method of finding out the truth almost instantly. I do not know of any court in any country which uses it now."

"Mr. Poggioli," inquired the inspector courteously, "would you expect me to turn a prisoner loose on evidence no court on earth would accept?"

"Wouldn't you prefer to loose an innocent man, even in an unconventional manner, than to see him go to jail for life, or perhaps to the gallows?"

Here the Magnificent Pompalone smilingly interrupted the colloquy.

"Gentlemen, allow me a word. It is true I did not poison Señor Grillet, nor do I

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know anything at all about him. However, I have innumerable other things in my mind which I would not expose for my fortune or my life. So, if my freedom depended upon my taking this new drug and telling all I know, I would go very cheerfully to the gallows instead."

The psychologist hesitated a moment and then with a little bow said—

"I suppose then, you don't care for my assistance?"

"On the contrary I will be glad indeed to enlist you in my behalf, but work on the facts, not on my sense of caution. Also I would like to ask Inspector Heinsius to place me in my room here in the hotel under guard, and allow this gentleman, Mr. Poggioli, the privilege of consulting with me at any time he sees fit."

Heinsius considered a moment and then agreed. He called his man, Barneveldt, then motioned to the dictator's traveling companion, Señor Afanador, and these three men, together with the American psychologist, went up the stairs to the dictator's suite of rooms. As they went up, the American in the lobby growled out—

"Hybrid American! He won't be no good, —— highbrow, ain't got no practical sense—"

On the second floor Señor Afanador and the Magnificent Pompalone went into their separate apartments and the dictator nodded for the inspector and the psychologist to follow him. When the door was closed, the ex-president turned suddenly from suave self-possession to flushed and swollen anger.

"Señores," he whipped out with that effect of hissing common to excited Latin-Americans, "I know the man who committed this outrage." He shook a finger toward Señor Afanador's room. "That traitor! That serpent! That crawling *Pizanista!*"

"But, señor," interrupted the psychologist, "what grounds have you for your charges?"

"Isn't Grillet dead? I had nothing to do with it, so Afanador must have done it!"

"But if he is a traitor and a *Pizanista* what motive had he in killing Señor Grillet and not you, Señor Pompalone?"

"*Ca*, there's the subtlety of it, Señor Poggioli!" exclaimed the dictator tensely. "I am worth more to the *Pizanista* alive in prison than dead. As long as I live there will be no other leader of my cause, but once I am dead—" the Magnificent Pompalone made a gesture—"some other patriot will spring up!"

He stood staring at the two men with black eyes protruding with rage.

"All I ask of you, Señor Poggioli, is to prove to Herr Inspector that this vile and perfidious wretch, Afanador, my secretary, sold out to my enemies and tried to betray me!"

"But, Señor Pompalone—"

"Señor Poggioli, this is not a debatable question! That is the solution! Now you prove it!"

"But I was going to say," persisted the psychologist, "this doesn't take into account the photographs of the Señora Sixto which Herr Heinsius mentioned to me, and the strange entry which Señor Grillet made on the back of the picture as he was dying."

The ex-president frowned, snapped his fingers.

"I HAVE it. He had timed the poison. He knew when Señor Grillet would expire. So he slipped in to the señor's room, found a picture, any picture of a woman, made this entry to give it an appearance of mystery, to involve me in an imaginary intrigue. To show that he chose completely at random, he didn't even select a woman any one knew—a Señora Sixto. Who is Señora Sixto? Nobody knows. Why his plot is puerile! It's elementary!"

Inspector Heinsius stood with a skeptical look on his broad, Dutch face.

"It seems to me, Señor President, it is not simple at all, it's rather too far-fetched to be true. I can't imagine a man working out such minutiae to his crime."

"Herr Heinsius," interposed Poggioli, "I ask you not to discard my client's theory merely because it is foreign to your northern temperament. What sounds far-fetched to a Hollander may be a most natural procedure to a Latin. Not that I agree with Señor Pompalone, but I recognize his hypothesis as tenable."

The inspector gave a faint shrug.

"I see you are a man of learning, Herr Professor, but I have had twenty-four years of experience as an inspector, and I have found that when a woman comes into a murder, she is a real woman and not just a picture."

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"This may be the one exception. Now I suggest that we go to Señor Afanador and hear his version of the tragedy."

The Magnificent Pompalone made a movement forward.

"No, let him alone, señores. He will prejudice you against me!"

"But we must hear what he says, Señor President," explained the inspector.

"Then be prepared for the most outrageous fabrications," warned the dictator. "He will stick at nothing! I don't doubt he will swear to you that he saw me place the poison in the bottle with my own hands!"

"That will be difficult proof to offset," observed the inspector.

"*Dios in cielo*, it will be!" sibilated the dictator making a furious gesture. "To be laid by the heels by such a scurvy liar; a cur, a worm, a foul maggot of a spy! *Ehue!*"

He broke into a rasping laugh and made a great sardonic gesture toward the door.

"Go! Go listen to him as if he were a man!"

The two northerners went out of the room, moved in spite of themselves by the Venezuelan's melodramatics. In the hallway they passed Barneveldt on guard, and a moment later entered the apartment of Señor Afanador.

At first glance Poggioli received a little shock, for the room appeared empty. But the next moment he was reassured, and somewhat disgusted to see the secretary pressed as closely as possible against the door communicating between his own and the dictator's room. Afanador had his ear to the crack of the door. His face was colorless, and his black eyes rolled as he listened intently to his chief.

When he saw the inspector and the psychologist, instead of exhibiting shame, he drew a breath of relief and came toward them panting, as if after some great exertion.

"Señores," he said in a whisper, getting out a handkerchief and dabbing his brow, "I know that his excellency, the President of Venezuela, suspects me in this matter, does he not?"

Heinsius nodded briefly, moved by a distaste for the man—

"He does, Señor Afanador."

The secretary stretched out a hand that trembled.

"*Ola*, señores, I—" He glanced with widened eyes at the door communicating between his own room and Señor Pompalone's. "Is that lock strong?" he whispered.

"Certainly," tossed out the inspector. "It's an old Dutch lock. It would hold an ox. Nobody can get through it without a key."

Afanador breathed a little more easily.

"That's good, that's very good!" He smiled wrily. "Señores, you do not require a guard to keep me in this room."

The inspector's contempt for a coward got the better of his voice.

"Herr Afanador," he sneered, "I suppose you are prepared to say that you saw Señor Pompalone drop the poison in the wine bottle?"

"*Carambal*" cried the secretary, coming out of his ague of fear in his surprize and denial. "I am prepared to say nothing of the sort! His excellency, the president, is as innocent of that murder as a saint in heaven! It is as shocking and mysterious to him as it is to me."

The psychologist stared at this direct denial of what he had expected to hear. Then he observed that the secretary made this statement in a loud tone. He went up intimately to the fellow and asked under his breath—

"Is that your real opinion, Señor Afanador?"

"*Si, si, señor*," nodded the fellow earnestly, now speaking in an undertone himself. "I know his excellency, the president, had nothing whatever to do with the poisoning."

Heinsius stared in puzzled contempt. "Then why are you shivering and shaking and asking about the lock, if you are going to stand by your employer like a man!"

The fellow's face, which had resumed a little color, went sickly again.

"Because his excellency suspects me, señores," he whispered. "Do you know, up until now he has had nine private secretaries. They are—" He waggled a finger and pulled down his lips dolefully. "One after the other they fell under his suspicion; some for one reason, some for another. No doubt many of them were innocent, as I am, but—" he shrugged miserably and spread his hands—"his excellency can not risk anything. He is so much more valuable than we. Perhaps we are innocent, well—we die for our country. We are patriots! I have heard his excellency explain it many times. We are all patriots—I am the tenth patriot."

Señor Afanador moistened his dry mouth with his tongue.

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THE psychologist was moved to an equivocal sympathy and disgust. There was more than a hint in this of the old Incan caste which caused those Indians to lay down their lives in unquestioning self-sacrifice for their rulers. He recalled that much of the Venezuelan blood is of Indian origin.

Herr Heinsius muttered a contemptuous oath under his breath.

"Help us clear the matter up, Afanador," suggested Poggioli. "If you can show another murderer, he will no longer suspect you. What is your idea about the poisoning of the wine?"

"Do you know who did it?" questioned the inspector bluntly.

"I don't know who did it, but I know when it was done."

Heinsuis gave a snort.

"That isn't a very difficult problem. It was done when Señor Grillet went back to his cellar, naturally."

"Ye-es," admitted the secretary a little taken aback. "But I can be even more exact than that. It was done when his excellency and I walked with Señor Grillet down the hallway to the head of the staircase."

"Did all three of you leave the room together?" inquired the inspector in astonishment.

"*Ciertamente, señor!*" ejaculated Afanador. "We had paid for our rooms. In a way we were the hosts of Señor Grillet, and you do not imagine we would allow a guest to walk out of our room unaccompanied. We are Venezuelan *caballeros*, señores, always. We went with him. When we returned I observed that some one had entered during our absence, and had moved the wine bottles."

"How long did you stay out of your room?"

"For ten or fifteen minutes, señores. Neither of us had seen Curacao before, and we stood at the window looking out on the canal and the houses."

"And who do you think came in and tampered with your wine?" interrogated Heinsius, a little more credulous of the story.

Afanador spread his hands.

"Señores, this may sound impossible to you, but I believe some spy, one of the *Pizanistas*, followed us here from LaGuayra, slipped into our room at that unfortunate moment when his excellency and I were out, and poisoned our wine."

Heinsius shrugged in the awkward manner of a Dutchman in Curacao.

"Moonshine, Poggioli; every tale they concoct fizzles into moonshine at last. I don't see that we need to go any further with this investigation. Pompalone poisoned Grillet over an old affair with a woman, and that ends it."

"Just a moment, inspector—Señor Afanador, have you any theory why this supposed spy did not poison all three of the bottles, and be sure of killing Pompalone?"

"That would have cast suspicion on some fourth person, and he himself might have got apprehended. No, the logical thing was to kill one man; the other two would certainly be arrested and held prisoners, while the actual poisoner would be free of any suspicion at all."

The inspector laughed.

"Señor Afanador, you have concocted the flimsiest story of all—a third mysterious Venezuelan unseen, unknown, floating into your room and poisoning your wine in a fifteen minute interval—that would make good fiction, but poor testimony before a court of law."

The secretary flushed, lifted his right hand.

"Señores, calling on Him Who Reads My Heart, I swear to you somebody tampered with our bottles while his excellency and I were out. There is no doubt about that. They were moved. I know they were moved!"

"Well, anyway," returned the inspector ironically, "I don't suspect you of the crime, Señor Afanador, and I don't believe the court will either. You can rest easy on that point."

The psychologist had just an opposite thought in his mind.

"But señores!" cried the secretary. "I would give my life a thousand times for his excellency. He alone can save my poor country, my poor Venezuela!"

The inspector turned on his heel in disgust, and walked out of the room. When Poggioli followed and closed the door, Heinsius reiterated.

"There is no use pursuing their inventions. Their suspicions chase around and around, like a puppy after its tail."

The psychologist stood stroking his jaw and looking at Barneveldt.

"I think some one did enter their room

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during their absence, Herr Heinsius," he said.

The inspector stared.

"Surely Afanador hasn't converted you to the theory of the imaginary spy!"

"No, but still I think somebody did."

"Who could it have been?"

"Well, everybody was down stairs at breakfast except these two men and the girl Hortensia."

The inspector who was starting down the stairway stopped and stared at his companion with the color falling out of his sun-browned face.

"*Gott in Himmel, Herr Professor!* What are you saying! Not that my poor crushed little Hortensia murdered her own father!"

The American lifted a hand.

"Don't let your feelings enter into this problem, Herr Heinsius. I know she is your friend; that you feel almost like a father to her. But she herself told you she had quarreled with her father about the wine bottles—"

"*Ach*, yes, but it was only a little quarrel. She only wanted to wipe the cobwebs off the bottles, Herr Poggioli—"

"That is true, but she is an only child and probably a spoiled one. And then she is of Venezuelan blood, fiery and rash. Perhaps she committed this mad act in a moment of fury. Now look at her; her grief is uncontrollable."

"Why, that's scandalous, outrageous, an infernal explanation; that innocent child, that bereaved daughter. She is as innocent as a saint in paradise!"

"I certainly hope so," returned Poggioli warmly. "But in solving a problem, Herr Heinsius, it is our duty to pursue every line of evidence. You don't object to my talking for a moment with the Señorita Hortensia, do you?"

"No, no, not at all. I will go after her. I am sure you will find her—as you have found all the other witnesses, quite innocent."

And with a faintly ironic bow, Inspector Heinsius set out up the hallway to find the Señoita Hortensia Grillet. Poggioli entered his client's room to await the return of the Dutchman with the girl.

THE psychologist found the ex-dictator standing by the barred window of his room, in a bellicose attitude with his shoulders thrown back and his head down, staring at the shipping along the canal as if it were the enemy's works which he meant presently to charge.

As the American entered, Pompalone turned and said—

"I suppose Señor Afanador testified against me in every detail?"

"No," returned the psychologist, "quite the contrary."

And he began telling what Afanador really had said, and how he had expressed a desire to give his life for Pompalone's freedom.

The Magnificent Pompalone broke into the account with a gesture.

"Don't you see the subtlety of this viper!" he cried. "He has concocted a perfectly unbelievable tale to cast a darker suspicion on me. A second *Pizanista* on my trail! Excuse me, Herr Poggioli. One is quite enough for me, and he is that scurvy cur, Afanador!"

"But Señor Pompalone, is it a fact that you and Señor Afanador accompanied Señor Grillet to the head of the steps this morning and remained at the window for several minutes before returning to your rooms?"

"Certainly, that is the truth," snapped the dictator. "But Afanador simply seized that fact to hang a long cock-and-bull story on it. No, nobody entered our room in our absence. Who was there in the second story to do it? It's his —— treachery!"

The psychologist saw it was impossible to discuss the secretary's theory, and he turned impatiently to the door, wondering what was detaining Herr Heinsius and the Señorita Hortensia. He stepped outside again and saw the inspector standing at some distance down the hallway with a pleased expression on his broad brown face.

"What are you waiting on?" called Poggioli impatiently.

The inspector winked silently in reply.

The psychologist's patience was of academic brevity. He advanced sharply on the officer.

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Nothing at all," returned the Dutchman in the best of spirits. "I've thought of a little plan to trick this scoundrelly Venezuelan."

"You have—how have you done it?"

The Dutchman studied the psychologist a moment.

"You won't warn your client, you won't give me away?"

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"No! No!" snapped the American. "If he's guilty, I'm as keen to see him hanged as you are!"

"So—I told Hortensia to put on her mother's clothes."

"What was that for?"

"You know how much like the photograph Hortensia is. Perhaps when Pompalone sees the girl he will be shocked into a restoration of his memory."

The psychologist was moved with the first touch of admiration he had felt for the Dutchman.

"By George, Heinsius," he whispered warmly. "Capital! Splendid! I'll give you an 'A' on that!"

"Thanks! Thanks!" whispered the inspector, gratified.

Both men now stood looking eagerly up the hall for Hortensia.

Three minutes later a door opened and Hortensia Grillet came out. At the sight of her a little thrill moved even the pulse of the psychologist.

The girl wore a black dress with a band of mourning purple at her bosom. Her dust-cap was gone and her dark hair was piled high after the stately fashion of a Venezuelan señorita. About her neck hung a string of matched pearls.

The two men stared at the transformation. Almost as an afterthought in the wake of her loveliness, Poggioli recalled what he had meant to ask the girl.

"Señorita," he began a little awkwardly, "I have a question to ask you. This morning when your father went to his wine cellar did you see Señor Pompalone and Señor Afanador come out of their room and stand looking out of the hall window at the canal?"

"*Sí, señor*," the girl nodded faintly, questioning the American with large eyes.

"And may I ask, señorita, if you or any other person entered their breakfast room while they were out?"

"I did, señor," breathed Hortensia.

"And what did you do in there, señorita?" queried the psychologist studying her face intently.

"Señor, I—I—one of the wine bottles was so cobwebby, Señor, I could not endure to see it set before Venezuelan *caballeros*. So I slipped in and wiped it clean. But I am sorry now, señor, I disobeyed my poor father's last wish."

She was about to cry again.

"Well, don't feel so badly about it, Hortensia—that was all you did, cleaned a bottle?"

"*Sí, señor*."

The psychologist stood nodding gently.

"That shows Afanador was right in this respect, Herr Heinsius. Some one did enter their room in their absence."

"I hope I did nothing wrong," exclaimed the girl in alarm.

"Nothing at all," assured Heinsius. "Just a little question between me and Herr Professor. Now I want you to come with me and state what you have just told me to Señor Pompalone."

"That is a very simple thing, señores," agreed the girl in a low tone. "I will tell it to any one."

The three passed the sentry, Barneveldt, into the dictator's room once more.

The Magnificent Pompalone had flung himself down on a sofa. As the group entered he looked up, saw Hortensia, and sprang to his feet with the swiftest change of expression.

"Maria in Heaven!" he exclaimed in amazement. "Is this the exquisite Ana Carrera again? Has my good angel so blessed me?"

The girl was bewildered at his words and his emotion.

"Señor Pompalone, Ana Carrera was my mother—"

"Your mother!"

"*Sí, señor*."

"Is it possible! Why, señorita, you are her very flesh and spirit; the same look, the same soft music of her speech—"

The girl flushed a trifle.

"My mother died when I was born, señor."

"*Pobrecita!*"

The Magnificent Pompalone crossed himself, then went to her and with the utmost gentleness, lifted and pressed her small work-hardened fingers to his lips.

"Poor little dove, left all alone in the world—"

Hortensia caught a breath that lifted her bosom and her pearls.

"*Sí, señor*, my mother and father are both gone now."

The dictator touched the jewels with delicate fingers.

"*Ole, señorita*, these were Ana's pearls. I remember how long I was collecting them from Margharita Island, the divers—"

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"Oh, señor, did you gather these pearls for my mother?"

"And I could swear they were about her neck this moment!"

"Am I indeed like her?"

"As two orchids from one stem!"

"Was she as tall as I?"

"To my shoulder, both of you."

"And her hair so black?"

"It was like a silken summer night with jeweled combs for constellations."

The girl stretched her hands toward the dictator.

"*Mia madrecita!* My poor little mother!"

She began to weep once more.

Neither the inspector nor the psychologist was so hardened as to break into the girl's eager questioning about her lost mother. The two northern men stepped quietly out of the room and left Hortensia and her informant to their causerie.

Outside Inspector Heinsius drew a long breath.

"So-o—" he breathed, without any triumph in his voice. "It was as I expected. He forgot himself, gave himself completely away over a woman. Herr Professor, these Latins are incomprehensible beings, so subtle, so simple, so complex, yet so easily entangled; so like fiends out of hell and yet so lovable."

The Dutchman sighed, and then added quite irrelevantly.

"*Ach*, I am glad I didn't marry one, anyway."

Then he said that his work was over, that he would go back to his office, send men back to arrest the dictator and throw him in jail.

The psychologist himself was depressed over the interview upstairs. But he asked the inspector to keep the dictator under guard in the hotel that afternoon and give him time to think over the whole problem.

"Come back and take dinner with me here this evening," he suggested, "and I will tell you the result of my analysis."

The Dutchman shrugged, awkwardly, but finally.

"There can be but one result, Herr Professor."

"I am afraid so," agreed the American. "And yet Señor Pompalone wears every aspect of innocence—"

"A Venezuelan," grunted the inspector, and shrugged.

MR. POGGIOLI accompanied his friend to the door of the hostelry, and watched him shoulder his way through the half gale that was sweeping along the street. The wind, driving in from the sea felt moist, and the sunshine that struggled through the vaporous air might have been English sunlight instead of the usual diamond brilliance of Curacao.

As the psychologist turned back into the lobby, a group of the guests watched him, and the American salesman called baldly—

"Poggioli, what did you find out—did the greaser kill him?"

"I don't know," returned the psychologist heavily and hurried upstairs.

The salesman winked at the silent group.

"Highbrow, no practical sense—now if I had had that case—"

In the upper story the American asked Barneveldt where Señorita Grillet had gone.

"To her room, Mynherr," answered the guard.

The psychologist was vaguely disappointed. He had an inclination to question Hortensia a little further. He hardly knew along what line, her father, her mother, perhaps. But he would not disturb her in her room.

He moved on, his mood tuned to the gray tragedy, thinking over its conflicting details. His steps carried him into the private library where Señor Grillet's body was by now laid out for burial by the undertaker.

The psychologist walked over to the greenheart table, picked up and looked at the photograph with its two enigmatic annotations on its back. He read them silently, "Account 12 *de Agosto* 1906. Account settled 5 *de Enero* 1925."

Poggioli wondered if the dead man, lying under the white sheet on the cane settee, had stolen Pompalone's wife or betrothed on that August day in nineteen hundred and six—

After all its permutations, the riddle had come back to the inspector's simple solution—"When there is a woman in a murder case," the Dutchman had said, "my twenty-four years' experience tells me she is a real one and not a photograph."

And so it had proved.

But there was a snarl somewhere in the burden of proof. It did not seem to Poggioli that the Magnificent Pompalone was a man who would murder by strategy. He

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could not imagine the dictator slipping poison into a wine bottle—Afanador would have done that—

He began reviewing the dictator's case against his secretary. This too was too nebulous, too fantastic.

The psychologist's mind went over other details of the tragedy, the accidental, the irrelevant details—the murdered man's anger with his daughter for wanting to clean the bottles, her disobedience in slipping into the room and dusting them after his injunction, the girl's eagerness to hear about her mother of whom, evidently, her father never spoke. Naturally he would not.

And still, the Magnificent Pompalone seemed to hold no bitterness against Ana Sixto y Carrera. This, too, seemed not quite in keeping with his temperament. In fact the only suggestion of the dictator's innocence was psychological. What would a jury of hard-headed Curacaoan Dutch make of a defense founded on psychology!

The wind was piping now an eerie threnody about the eaves of the big hotel. The dead man, done to death by some mysterious assailant, lay on the long wicker couch with the sheet drawn to his chin. On the table beside the photograph of the woman lay the contents of the dead man's pockets; a small penknife, a few pieces of Netherland money, a ring of keys, noncommittal relics beside the faded photograph.

Then it just occurred to Poggioli that this woman had never come to Curacao with the tavern keeper. According to Van Maasdyk, Señor Grillet arrived in Curacao accompanied only by his baby girl, Hortensia. The psychologist could not piece together these details of the tragedy. As he sat listening to the wind and the far-off resurgence of the sea, he had a feeling as if he were working with some jig-saw puzzle. A number of pieces seemed to fit, but he felt they were wrongly placed, yet he almost dared not undo the few articulating sections for fear he would never make even an approach to a pattern again.

In an effort to relieve his mind of these incongruities, he opened one of the book cases and selected two or three volumes. They were all old-fashioned romances of revenge, "The Corsican Brothers," "Vendetta," "The Count Balderschino." Apparently the whole library was of this tenor.

It struck the investigator that Señor Grillet had been fearing this very fate, and that explained the mystery of the last notation on the portrait. He had expiated his abduction of Pompalone's wife, or mistress. His account had been settled with his life. Now he lay in the darkening library, the sheet drawn up to his chin, with a rising storm wailing his requiem.

After all The Magnificent Pompalone had done his man to death. It was somehow out of character, but Pompalone was even more Latin than the American-Italian who was trying to understand his crime; and an individual of one race is always more or less out of character to a man of another.

From the lower story there floated the three notes of the dinner-gong repeated over and over. Even if the storm brewed and men were murdered, travelers had to eat. The psychologist got up and went below.

IN THE lobby the American found Herr Heinsius awaiting him. The two men went together into the dining-room which was already full. They took a small table in the corner of the room. The negro, Zubio, brought them water and the menu card. The inspector looked over the good Dutch dishes with pleased eyes.

"Suppose we do not discuss our problem until after we eat, Herr Professor," suggested Heinsius with a Dutchman's respect for a good meal.

"We don't have to," said the psychologist. "I have come to a decision."

The inspector glanced up keenly.

"You have?"

"Yes, I agree with you."

"*Ach,*" exclaimed the inspector, with a falling of the face.

"I am sorry to hear it, Herr Professor; I had hoped somehow you would fasten the murder somewhere else than on Herr Pompalone, but, of course, the facts remain facts—"

Zubio approached with the soup.

"Let us think no more about it until after we have dined."

He began swathing himself with a huge napkin while his mild eyes shone at the clear green turtle soup.

Over the big dining-room the other guests were eating in accordance with their national manners. An Englishman was diligently using his knife and fork, holding one in each hand without ever laying either

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implement down. It gave him a certain rushed appearance.

A German pinched each piece of bread on a plate before he selected his roll. An Italian made a sucking sound as he inhaled the spaghetti from his plate. All were mutually bad-mannered, each to the other. The American soap salesman drummed his knife on the table and called to Zubio—

"Here, nigger, come here, you!"

As Zubio approached, the soap seller began in an offended tone—

"Do you call this stuff wine!" He tapped his bottle.

Zubio bobbed.

"Yas, suh, dat—dat's whut I calls it, *senyo*."

"Well, I call it ditch water! Have you got anything a man can drink?"

"*Sí, senyo*."

"Something old and prime."

"*Sí, sí, senyo*."

The American flipped out a coin.

"Go bring me some of the oldest and best you've got in this joint."

"Yah, yessuh, *sí, oui M'sieu*," he bobbed in polyglot, moved by the money.

Zubio hurried away and presently Poggioli heard him calling in his thick blurred tones in the lobby:

"Señorita! Oh señorita, come down! *Un Americano* wants the best wine, the oldest wine—"

Poggioli cursed the salesman for disturbing the grief-stricken girl over a glass of wine.

There was more long-distance conversation which the psychologist could not understand. After a while the señorita came into the dining-room and approached the salesman.

"Señor," she said in a low tone, "nobody but father knew much about the wine. He always attended to it himself. I don't know which is the best or the worst."

"Bring me the oldest," ordered the American roundly, "and here is a five for yourself—"

But the girl hurried away leaving him holding the bill in his fingers. She said to Zubio—

"I think you will find the key to the wine cellar among father's things on the library table upstairs."

Then she hurried from the room.

Poggioli condemned the salesman again, looking across the tables at him; then with a swerve in his thoughts he began pondering on what the girl had just said; her father always had kept the key to the wine cellar. For some reason he recalled once more that Señor Grillet had quarreled with his daughter that morning over cleaning the dusty bottles. Both of these little points were odd—Grillet's anger at the girl for offering to polish a bottle; and then she had slipped in and cleaned it anyway.

It seemed to Poggioli that these pieces of the grim jig-saw puzzle suddenly fitted together perfectly. There was something exciting about it. It cast a vague light over the whole tragic occurrence. He tried to think out a fuller connection.

A cat, which probably haunted the dining-room, rubbed against his ankle and disturbed the delicate skein of his thoughts. He tried to kick the animal under his chair. A moment later Zubio entered with a single, very cobwebby bottle of amber liquid borne aloft on a silver tray. The black carried it to the drummer's table and began opening it with elaborate ceremony.

As he was pouring the liquid into the American's glass a sudden impulse seized the psychologist. He swooped down, picked up the cat at his feet, and next moment sprang up and strode toward the salesman's table.

"Just a moment," he called in a low urgent tone. "Wait, put that glass down, sir! Let me test it before you drink it!"

The soap salesman stared at Poggiolo in amazement and irritation.

"Where the —— do you come in—"

"I don't know exactly. I have an idea, an impression—give me a spoonful of that wine. I believe it's dangerous!"

The American stared with glass uplifted, but he did not drink. He got a spoon and dipped in the liquid. The psychologist produced the cat with a certain effect of legerdemain.

"Pour some down its throat. I'll hold its mouth open!"

Came a chorus of ejaculations and grunts from the other tables. Inspector Heinsius hurried to Poggioli's side. The cat mewed and scratched, but the wine was poured into its mouth. After a moment of watching the psychologist commanded—

"Another spoonful."

"Aw, you're kiddin' me," cried the salesman, growing red in the face.

"You try it, Inspector," directed Poggioli briefly.



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The inspector reached for the spoon. As he went to pour more wine in the cat's mouth, he ejaculated—

"*Ach!* The creature's dead!"

The soap salesman turned cotton-colored.

"Dead! How come it's dead? What killed it?"

Excited comments set up throughout the room. Came a movement of guests toward the table. Inspector Heinsius was amazed.

"Herr Professor, how did you know; why did you suspect?"

"Come out of the crowd," directed the psychologist. "We can't talk here."

THE inspector ordered Zubio to retain the poisoned wine as evidence, and the two men went into the lobby; but the lobby was instantly filled from the dining-room. The inspector and the psychologist passed on out the door into the night together.

A gale laden with spume whipped them as they entered the canal side.

"Come to my office on the Leidenstraat!" shouted the inspector above the wind. "We can talk there."

In the dim street light the psychologist wagged a nervous negative finger.

"Let's stay out a while. I'm jumpy. I've been indoors too much today."

"Let's turn up this street where it's quieter."

The two friends turned down a side street, and went holding each other's arms in the occasional gusts that swept the narrow thoroughfare. After they had walked some distance the inspector came back to the point they had been discussing.

"Why did you suspect that bottle of wine was poisoned? It came straight from the cellar?"

"The thing that set me off," said Poggioli, lifting his voice, "was the fact that the bottle was cobwebby and dusty, exactly like the one Señor Grillet had served to the men upstairs. Added to that was a complex of associated ideas touching Grillet's quarrel with his daughter. As a matter of fact, Herr Heinsius, what we call our reason is never the fatally sure, mathematical progression we fancy it is. If you will examine reason in the making you will find it a very cloudy process; a kind of blind jumping among hypotheses. When it finally hits the right one, it then proceeds to build a logical bridge from its point of departure to its goal; and it imagines it crosses on that bridge, but it does not. The bridge was flung out afterward."

The inspector laughed briefly.

"That's all right how you did it, Herr Professor. I am neither an undergraduate nor a fellow in psychology. Why should Grillet poison himself? Why should Zubio infallibly have brought up another poisoned bottle out of a cellar of good wine? Why—"

"Here, take a question at a time," cried the psychologist. "The negro brought up a poisoned bottle because he picked out the oldest one in the cellar, according to the order of the soap salesman."

"Why should the oldest be poisoned?"

"Because Señor Grillet brought a case of poisoned wine with him from Venezuela when he came to Curacao some twenty years ago."

"You don't mean!" cried the inspector, "you thought of all these things when you leaped up and ran to the American!"

"No, I received what the vulgar call a 'hunch.' Now when we analyze 'hunches' we find they are composed of an instinctive correlation of facts which have not yet reached the surface of consciousness—"

"Yes, that's all right about hunches, but why did Grillet bring poisoned wine with him from Caracas twenty years ago?"

"Because the Magnificent Pompalone had stolen his wife. You see we approached this problem with a reversed theory. We worked on the idea that Pompalone had a grievance against Señor Sixto, *alias* Grillet, and murdered him for it. In reality Sixto had a grievance against Pompalone.

"If we had paused to consider feminine nature, we might have known that a man like Grillet could never have alienated the wife of a man like Pompalone. On the contrary, what could be more natural than the dictator of Venezuela seizing on the wife of some humble fellow and possessing her. These dictators have a high-handed way with them."

The inspector nodded in the darkness.

"That hangs together all right, Herr Professor, and then what happened?"

"Then Grillet, or Sixto, took his infant daughter, Hortensia, and a case of poisoned wine and emigrated from Venezuela to Curacao, and here set up the finest hostelry in the city."

"Perhaps he had been a tavern keeper in Caracas?"

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"I doubt it. I feel sure Señor Sixto studied out his complete revenge on the Magnificent Pompalone twenty years ago. He reasoned Pompalone would be deposed eventually; that he would fly for sanctuary to Curacoa, which is the nearest free port to Venezuela. He knew the Magnificent would lodge in the finest hostelry in the city. Therefore, to accomplish his revenge, he must possess that finest hotel, together with his case of poisoned wine."

The inspector nodded, impressed by the psychologist's extraordinary analysis.

"Sixto accomplished his purpose," said the Dutchman. "His meals were a delight, and his rooms as sweet as the sea air itself. Even his daughter, a native Venezuelan, was cleanlier than we Dutch."

"That was all built up, waiting for one man to enter his door and die. That man was the Magnificent Pompalone. And here is the irony of it, Herr Inspector; the satire that sometimes makes me believe in the old pagan gods who laughed at the antics of mankind. The very carefulness with which Señor Sixto trained his daughter led to his own death."

Heinsius listened interrogatively.

"When Hortensia, who could endure nothing dirty or dusty, cleaned the cobwebs off the wine bottle in the breakfast room, she killed her own father."

"How did she do that?" cried the officer in amazement.

"When Señor Sixto carried the breakfast with the poisoned wine to his guests, naturally he was tremendously excited. The vengeance of twenty years was about to be consummated. He meant to hand the Magnificent Pompalone the oldest, dustiest and cobwebbiest bottle on the platter with a pretty speech such as all Venezuelans know how to make, and poison him.

"When he met Hortensia on the upper floor she wanted to clean the poisoned bottle. That was his mark, the cobwebs. It unstrung him. He reprimanded her severely and told her to go about her work. Then he was called down to the wine cellar, for naturally he never allowed any one to enter that dangerous place except himself. His guests accompanied him to the stairs. Hortensia, annoyed by the dust, as he had trained her to be, saw her opportunity to slip in and clean the worst of the bottles, the poisoned one. When Sixto returned with the excitement of murder upon him, he did not observe the change. He gave his enemy the dustiest bottle, and drank his own bane. Herr Heinsius, if it were in our power to exchange our earthiness for the high divan of the gods, if we could look down on this tragedy; this romantic revengeful man, after twenty years of waiting and hating and planning, then sitting before his enemy and drinking his own poison, all through mere excess of training his child, Herr Heinsius, I think we too, would have been moved, as were the Olympian gods, to enormous laughter."

The inspector was somehow dismayed at his companion's phantasy. He said uneasily—

"But naturally we don't believe in the old pagan gods any more."

"Oh no, certainly not," agreed the psychologist. "But they really do explain life more accurately than our modern theology, don't you think? Sometimes it seems to me that men have a reverse theory of the gods; just as you and I did of the murder. Suppose men assumed that the gods were inimical or satiric toward them instead of friendly, how many of the perplexities of life that would explain."

"Well—I'm a good churchman myself," said Heinsius.

"Oh, so am I," agreed the American.

The two walked on with a feeling of spiritual disjunction at this little quirk in their conversation. Poggioli regretted he had mentioned his whimsy.

The two had walked out past the houses now onto a little pleasure beach, which was quite deserted in the gale. A string of pale electric lights along the water's edge showed the curves of the incoming waves which marched in endless procession from the dark Carribean. Spindrift blew in past the lights in torn veils, and its last mist beat gratefully on the faces of the two companions. Poggioli continued musing over the ironic death of the hotel keeper, and the odd triumph of Pompalone. There was a moral planlessness, an anarchy about it. The line of a poem recurred to his mind, "perpetual strife amid confused alarms." That was life, perpetual strife—

Here the inspector touched the scientist's arm and pointed out to sea.

"There's a brave soul out there," he called above the surf.

Poggioli looked and saw a red and green signal burning in the darkness.

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"Fishermen?" queried Poggioli in a friendly tone.

"Natives in a jack boat, I suppose. They brave any sea."

The inspector had begun a description of jack boats, the bottom hewn out of a solid log, when he was interrupted by two figures silhouetted against the row of watery beach lights. A large man and a slight one were hurrying toward the surf.

The psychologist and the inspector watched them curiously, when at a certain resolute bearing of the larger man, the inspector gasped suddenly —

"*Mein Gott!* That's the Magnificent Pompalone!" and he dashed down the strand after the dictator.

Poggioli set out running after him.

"Let him go, Herr Inspector!" shouted the American." He hasn't committed any crime in this country!"

"Gott in Himmel, but he mustn't go back! That's worse than a crime! It's against business!"

The police inspector jerked out a pistol as he ran and shouted against the blast—

"Stop! Halt! I'll shoot!"

But at that moment the two figures dashed across the last shining foot of sand and plunged headlong into the curve of an incoming wave.

The inspector fired four shots into the surf, then with an oath turned his fire on the signal lights at sea. But perhaps the tossed sailors never knew that a man on shore was firing at them. After some fifteen minutes the signal lights blinked out.

As the two men turned back to the hotel, the psychologist said frankly.

"Heinsius, I'm glad he's gone. He was a very devil no doubt, but there was something likable, something rather splendid about the fellow—"

"You mean he was Pompalone the Magnificent—"

At this moment a figure dashed out of the side street shouting a huge, mouthy negroid shout as if the fiends were after him—

"Herr Inspectuh! Senyo Inspectuh! Mistuh Inspectuh!"

Both men stared in the new direction and saw the white-eyed figure of Zubio appear against the night.

"He's coming to tell us they're gone!" said the Dutchman.

Zubio made for the two.

"Herr Inspectuh!" he gasped, "come to the hotel, *pronto!* quick!"

"I know they are gone, Zubio."

"Gone! Gone! No! Poor Senyo Afanador, some one has struck a dagger to his heart!"

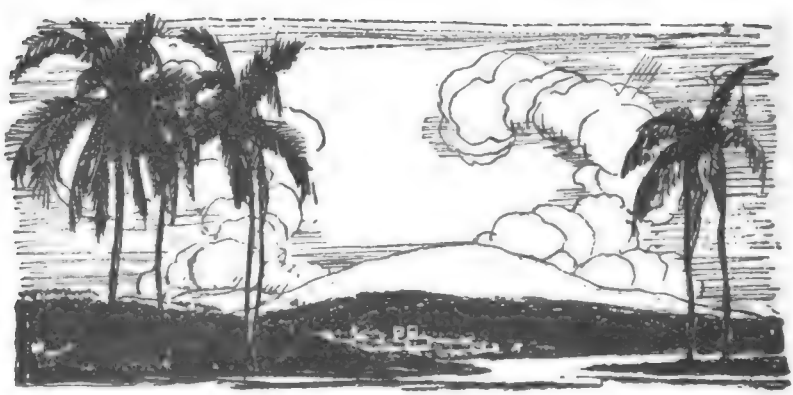
Heinsius swayed in the gale.

"What! Afanador murdered! *Mein Gott!* I saw him that moment—where was Barneveldt?"

"Sitting by the door where you put him, Herr Inspectuh. Somebody opened the doors on the inside between all the rooms; somebody with a key; and now Señorita Hortensia is gone, run away, mad perhaps."

Simultaneously the two men whirled and stared out into the black, incoming surf. They could see nothing at all.

On the following day, immediately after the funeral of Señors Grillet and Afanader, the Hotel Saragossa was closed and its windows and doors boarded up.



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# THE CAMP FIRE

## A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

**Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.**

**We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.**

**But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.**

**Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.**

**If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.**

FROM E. E. Harriman of our writers' brigade and "Ask Adventure." What is the longest recorded and authenticated jump made by a horse with a rider?

Los Angeles.

I suppose I am too late to take part in the discussion between Lieut.-Col. Rodney and Mr. Whiteaker, but just for fun I am going to say a few words:

I HAVE ridden many horses against all kinds of jumps. I have made a horse jump a ditch fifteen feet wide, four times in succession, as a punishment for refusing an easy jump. I rode him bareback at the time and the jump inconvenienced me about as much as would the jolt from having a rocking-chair bump a lead-pencil on the floor.

I sat that horse with my body leaning forward not more than ten degrees from a perpendicular and when my horse landed I was not more than that much back of the perpendicular. I sat him like a postage stamp, with my heels hooked under his body.

I have had a cow pony jump down a four foot, vertical drop to a trail below, with me on his back, coming down a steep mountainside. I have jumped fences on a horse. I have ridden a horse at a fast gallop through a thick, hardwood forest, heading off cows, and jumped him over logs. In this case I sat a sheepskin, with thick wool on it, held by a surcingle, with no stirrups.

In fence jumping and the four-foot drop I rode a stock saddle. When I had the saddle, I made the balls of my feet take the bump, with the spring of ankle and instep acting as cushions.

I LEARNED jumping without instruction from any one and I never had any trouble with a horse over it, after I had once gained his confidence and affection, a thing I always do with a saddler.



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In all my jumping of horses, I never yet leaned far forward or at all backward. I believed with Col. Rodney that a horse dislikes to feel his rider throw his weight over the shoulders. I knew that leaning back was likely to spring that back, causing excruciating pain. So my forward inclination was always there at the take-off, but slight at best, and I sat tight, unless I had a saddle, when I rose just enough to allow a clearance under the bosom of my pants.

I always rode with a long stirrup, yet could lift two inches off the saddle by straightening my legs. I have ridden all day, day after day, in that way. When I tried a shorter stirrup I tired more in two hours than I would in eight with my leathers long.

NOW about endurance of horses. When I weighed 214 and rode a 40-pound saddle I rode an 850-pound New Mexico cayuse daily for three years and never had him show any evidence of distress. Nor have I ever in my life given a horse a setfast or blistered back.

This, because I do not shift around, but "sit them straight up, in the middle," as Neal Hart once said of me, with approval, when he had me try his pet "top hoss" prior to taking her for a six-day ride.

Then I invariably put the bulk of my weight on the spring of ankle and instep, at trot, lope, single-foot or any other gait, save walk. My plug from the mountains of New Mexico averaged 30 miles a day, six days in the week, with me on that stock saddle, for months at a time, and kept in good condition.

I would like to ask how many *Adventure* readers ever measured a jump, made by a horse with a rider. I once jumped a black gelding over a flat pile of brush, 3½ feet high in the center, and by steel tape it was 19 feet 8 inches from take-off to landing-point, between the hoof marks. My brother Frank helped me measure it.

When I saw a college boy clear 21 feet 8 I wanted to take that gelding out and train him some more, but he was dead and I weighed 230. I have heard men declare a horse cleared thirty feet at a jump. I doubt it. I shall continue to doubt it, till it is proved.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

SOMETHING from Fairfax Downey concerning his story in this issue—a story that sets us down in the old blockade-running days of the Civil War:

New York City.

It's a story I've wanted to write since I visited Bermuda last summer. The golden aura of the old blockade-running days still hangs with an atmosphere of faint regret for lost prosperity about old St. George's town especially. The tourist trade is beginning to gild things up handsomely, however.

I GOT hold of Tom Taylor's book, "Running the Blockade," a simple narrative which conjures up the war days in great style. The book is published in England—or was published.

In case you have not read the book and this is of interest, Taylor was a young Britisher who stepped from a dry job with a mercantile firm to become one of the most famous supercargoes running the blockade. With the *Banshee* and other runners he was successful in getting through with munitions from Nassau to Wilmington and back again with cotton an extraordinary number of times. He was often under heavy fire from Northern gunboats. He made one narrow escape after another, only once losing his ship and suffering internment in New York.

The business of blockade-running must have been one continuously thrilling maritime game of hide-and-seek. Once Taylor faced the point-blank fire of the pistol of an excited Northern lieutenant who had boarded. Two bullets missed and the boarder speedily unboarded on a shout that the cargo of gunpowder was about to explode. It was Taylor who had the pleasure of throwing out of his office an infamous Confederate doctor who proposed the sweet little scheme of introducing clothing infected with yellow fever into Northern ports. That doc was ahead of his times.

I have tried to put some of the thrill I felt in reading the book into my story and I hope I have. I hope, too, you like the comedy.

Attached are two maps which may be useful if the story is acceptable.—FAIRFAX DOWNEY.

PRINTING this word of praise from one of our writers for another doesn't mean that I'm falling into bad habits, but it was generously spoken, in true Camp-Fire spirit, and I haven't the heart to suppress it. Also it will help make still stronger Camp-Fire's tendency to give its fiction writers fair chance and full hearing instead of condemning them for all eternity on the strength of a single slip. I suppose a magazine must always receive occasional acrimonious and unjust letters, but from our readers they are notable exceptions. Criticisms, yes. They are wanted, needed, often deserved. But a very small percentage of double-barreled abuse going off at half-cock to nobody's profit.

I note what you say in a recent *Adventure* about the critical attitude toward Bill Adams. That critics, bolstered up by the testimony of their sailor friends, have been keel-hauling Bill doesn't necessarily mean anything. I recall that Robert Cortes Holiday (better verify the spelling of this name if you want to use it) in one of his Murray Hill articles some years ago recorded an old San Francisco sea captain's denunciation of Conrad as a man who did not thoroughly know the sea, and used "The Nigger of the Narcissus" as illustrating Conrad's lack of sea-knowledge. Not ten days ago I was talking with Carl Clausen about Bill Adams. Clausen himself has written many sea stories. Clausen went to sea when he was twelve and stayed there, before the mast, for some ten years. He said: "Bill Adams is one of the best. He gets the forecastle talk down so pat that it gives me a chill at times. I know the very men he's writing about. It's just the way they talk. I wrote him a letter and told him so."

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ON THE other hand I know two men who collaborate in writing sea stories under a pen name that serves for both; they write of windjammers and get fine notices from the critics, Neither of them was ever on a sailing-ship.

Personally, I can't see how anybody would think Bill Adams doesn't know the sea. I don't see what they would lay hold on. Even if he made slips—have the critics' sailor friends pointed them out?—that would not mean he did not know the sea. Captain Salisbury in "The Sea Gypsy" has a leadsman song out "By the deep three!" which doesn't at all invalidate his seamanship or impair "The Sea Gypsy's" excellence as one of the finest stories of personal adventure. Did Jack London know the sea? Some of us think perhaps he did. Yet London made such slips that a landsman proof-reader of the Century Company called his attention to them when "The Sea-Wolf" was going through the press. It hasn't been many hours since an old sailor pointed out where I had had a "blind spot" in giving some sailors a three months' advance for an Australian voyage in a story called "Great Days," but, not being a critic, he said it was otherwise a true picture of the old Waterfront Days in San Francisco. The story to some extent was based on my sailors having a certain amount of money to spend; a three months' advance was about the right amount—so I, thoughtlessly, gave it to them.

I agree with Clausen: Bill Adams is one of the best. And you may make whatever use of this that you wish.—GORDON YOUNG.

AS ALREADY mentioned, Claude Ferrère's story in this issue, along with one in an earlier number, is merely a casual experiment in the fiction of other nations. No change of policy involved.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Kenneth Malcolm Murray rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. He has adventured around quite a bit already and if, after reading his letter, you think his wanderings are over—

*Jak sie masz, Panowie!* And if that sounds queer, take a peep into your Polish-English dictionary. I hate to tell you all how many times I've cleared my throat to make this little speech—getting all set with right toe three inches to the left and five to the rear! But now that your eyes are for the moment upon me I find myself all stiff and uncomfortable with waiting. So suppose I just leave out the rough stuff and get down to the high-lights, make my little speech, and sit down.

My earliest training was rather more in than on the tides of Fire Island. The Governor being an ex-seaman—first class, please—aboard the right royal *U. S. S. Yankee*, during those higly illuminating days in Cuba, I naturally sought to sail the bounding main. Membership in the 1st Battalion Naval Militia of New York was the next step, but I was so young that I had to enlist in the band, and then, when it turned out that I only loved music but couldn't make it, I was already sworn in and could not well be kicked out. So I was merely sworn at, and put in a division of the line; namely, the old Second Division; therefore the port watch. But imagine my surprise to find that my father's name was duly inscribed on the roster board! I had had no idea that he was a Second Division man! Naturally I strove to uphold the ramily record, and soon gained the mark of being the fastest gun captain (five-inch torpedo defense) in the Battalion. Proud? Well, I mean to say . . .

That was in the days when the grand old *Granite State*, 84 gun ship o' the line, was still among those present in the North River, New York. (Since then she has become her own funeral pyre. May the gods in Valhalla be good to her.)

The next step was the regular Navy, when I had what looked like the real misfortune to be an apprentice seaman in the U. S. Naval Training Station at Newport, R. I. Fighting Bob Evans' son was the "Exec." there then,—my but he had a picturesque line of talk! But that station was too much for me, and although I rose at one time to acting C. P. O., I soon caught up with myself on the God-awful grub they slung at us, and found myself keel up on a bed in the Navy hospital on the mainland. Said the Navy doctor, "Son, you've got appendicitis. Want to be operated on?" "Of course not," I replied, "But I suppose I haven't got much to say about it—" "No, not a —— thing. You'll be on the operating table at one o'clock sharp." It was then twelve. Well, that was that, but I must admit that they did a great job; I can arouse jealousy in any sawbones nowadays by simply showing him my scar! You know, like showing a fisherman a photograph of yourself holding aloft an eight-pound trout, or something like that!

HOME, and I tried being a bank runner—no, that doesn't mean running a bank, it means running for a bank, just plain freckle-faced messenger-boy. Naturally that soon came to an end. Next, bond runner. Then for a brokerage house. I had visions of myself making a Horatio Alger million by overhearing some big bugs drop dangerously good tips, and all that sort of gush! Bah! I soon quit and became a plain ordinary bum, sleeping days and buzzing at night in Greenwich Village—the old Village, when "Patchin Place" was truly passionate. Then one day a malicious doctor told my folks that I had T. B. and I found myself oozing westward toward dryer climes. On the train I met a handful of Mexican Border Patrols, and they got up a poker game and cleaned me cold of all but my ticket. Naturally I didn't eat much during the last half of that trip, but I got through O. K. The first place I hit was the wide open desert. A platform, a water tank, a couple of barrel cactus, some grease-wood as tall as your head, and whole handfuls of distance. That was all. And right there I began to think that I wasn't such a —— of a fellow after all. I was finally picked up by the twice-a-week truck, and carried around back of the mountains to Palm Springs.

TO BE brief, the next three months provided a few of the greatest revelations of my life. I found that I was, in a way, a remittance man, and only eighteen years old. And then somebody

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stopped the remittance! I assure you, good people, my education began to progress with leaps and bounds! I joined the Indians (Coachello Reservation) and would have been fool enough to go native if the Indian Chief of Police hadn't been wise and kind and given me a steer via a job. I became dry-nurse to a lot of mangy cows. But I learned about cattle from them, and, incidently, made just a little over a hundred dollars in three months. My heels promptly began to itch, and I cut and drifted on to the coast, to that so-called city, Los Angeles. In three days I was stoney.

The movies looked like easy money, but I stood around one of the big lots one whole day, in the broiling sun, with an empty stomach, and told every one I saw how I could do anything from directing to dish-washing. I got the dish-washing. But oh boy I did eat, for a day or two! Ran up the mess-bill too fast, I guess, because I was suddenly ordered out with the work-gang to dig post-holes in a 'dobe hillside. A horse broke out, one of their trained buckers, and I nabbed him, not forgetting to add on a little grandstand stuff—the foreman was looking! The next day, I was duly thankful to be able to ease my blistered palms doing next to nothing in the stables—they called me a "ranch-hand," fed me easy, and paid me forty-five simoleons almost every thirty days.

A COUPLE of months later I began to long for the "great open spaces," and beat it to Oregon with a little fellow called, as usual, Shorty. But, after some vicissitudes, we hit Stanfield, and Shorty played me a dirty trick by getting married to the rosy-cheeked lassie that threw us the hot biscuits every 6 A.M. I beat it again, after having a grand fight with pitchforks with the foreman. Three days later I was flat in that wee jumping-off place, Pilot Rock, Oregon. But the Postmaster saved my life with a free ticket to Portland on the condition that I would try to join the U. S. Cavalry. I did, I tried faithfully. But they kicked me out with "valvular heart-disease." Get that! Some disgusted, I did about everything in the way of work, from bus-boy in a big hotel (I ate again there, too) to driving an auto-stage, working in a paper mill (sneaking cigarettes behind the wall!) and working on a road-gang. And all this time America was getting all excited about the war. I didn't know it, though.

Finally I got thoroughly fed up, and after a month ot two in the stock-yards, first in the slaughter-room (another gorgeous job, not!) and then as "student cattle buyer," I oozed east again via fast freight (I was second in command of eight carloads of blinkin' sheep—gosh, but I hate sheep!) and was received with open arms by some of the old crowd. But somehow they didn't look good any more, and I cocked an ear toward the sound of the guns in France. Much preliminaries, and I found myself reporting for duty as an aviation cadet at Princeton Ground School of Military Aeronautics. Valvular heart-disease? Hokum! I said nothing about it, and they passed me as "perfect."

PRINCETON, Camp Dick, Dallas, Texas (had a grand time there as Colonel Steever's orderly, eating his specially sent over Sunday morning breakfasts—when he was not in the office!). Finally landed at Scott Field, Belleville, Illinois. Got my "wings" and commission, was all set to get my advance training (I was "pursuit") and heard that those who would become instructors and work for three months as such, would be sent over without further training. Fine! I grabbed it, and Washington moved the time up to six months, although I was by then the proud commander of a Flight. Armistice—a cold rainy day—and you never saw such a glum bunch of pilots as gathered for the noon meal in the officers' mess that day. Gloom? You could have cut it with a knife!

In due course I found myself a civilian again, but I guess I was far from being civil. This "democracy" stuff had got under my skin; some one had cheated me somewhere on this war proposition; and it took me a long time to pull out of it. In fact, I never did quite get over it, and when I made a sad and sorrowful fizzle out of the civilian flying game, with two ships of my own, I walked into the American Flying Club all on a summer's day and saw a cablegram from Poland posted on the hard-worked bulletin board. "Men wanted to join the Kosciuszko Squadron and fight the Bolsheviki!" That let me in. I decided it right then and there; it was my one chance to continue flying—at some one else's expense!

TWO weeks later I was gloriously drunk, outside the three-mile limit (it was three miles then) aboard the French Line's ship *Lafayette*. Five or six others were in the party; New Yorkers, Ohioans, Detroiters, Chicagoans, fine fellows all. Paris, and all that it implies, Cherbourg, the North Sea in a dinky little "limey" freighter (3,000 tons—no lifeboats) the hold loaded none too well with everything from high-explosives to Red Cross pajamas, six aeroplanes crated on deck, and the Baltic full of drifting Russian mines—not to mention the flotilla of fourteen submarines and one destroyer used by the Bolos to stop all the traffic that escaped the mines.

Eight days later we were safely tied up in Danzig harbor and, being the officer in charge of the military cargo, I was forced to stick around and see it safe into the hands of the Poles—some job, with the town full of Germans who did not know that their war was long since over! But we got by without much difficulty, and after a few days in Danzig, a week in Warsaw, my side-kick (I'm six feet and 'Andsome 'Arry was five feet five) and I joined the Squadron in Lwow (Lemberg), southern Poland.

IT WOULD be almost impossible to give any clear idea of the Squadron, and the life out there in the Ukrain. But it was colorful, and swift, and about three times as great as I'd hoped for, even though I was late, as usual. Things were pretty much on toward the end—the siege of Warsaw had just broken down—but we got in some good flying during those last few days, and drank and danced and laughed the nights away. We contributed to the old Lemberg Ballet and, with the help of a handful of girls from the Moscow school, managed to stage some great affairs. The Cossack chieftain on our front, Vohlinia (extending from Kief to the Black Sea), was a devil on wheels, and his thirty-odd thousand riders had kept the Squadron very much on the hop. Unluckily the Bolos had no pilots at that time, or our cup of happiness would have sure been full.

Then came old man Winter, and the armistice was signed. That was that, and after rehabilitating our flying gear, in case of an outbreak of hostilities, we

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devoted ourselves mostly to the gay pursuit of joy.

Spring, and I awoke one day to find myself standing with the fellows on the Warsaw aerodrome, being warmly shaken hands with by that grand old soldier, General Haller. He was pinning a little ribbon doo-dab on my left chest, and I don't mind saying that I was so tickled I almost wept on the old man's shoulder.

Tears were in his eyes, to tell the truth, for we were being demobed that afternoon, and somehow he must have known that he had fought his last battle. No, he's not dead, but he's a pretty old man, God bless him.

I STOPPED off in London on my way home, and went broke again, doggone it. Gone were the glorious days in Poland, gone was most of my pep, gone beyond all question of a doubt was my well-spent nine-dollars-a-month (my pay as 1st Lieutenant Pilot in the Polish Army) and so I decided to write something of my experiences and make a lot of money and go to Monte Carlo and make more at roulette (yes, pity me, I had a system!). Back and forth and up and down Fleet Street I walked, 'neath blistering sun and thick fog and rain. And when I once got an assignment from the London office of the New York *Tribune*, I made such a botch job of it that I should have been shot right then and there.

But I wasn't. The editor was awfully decent, and although I was out, with a capital O, my hopes were up, and I've stuck to it ever since, making a little here and there, working about eighteen hours almost every day, starving with regularity—and then one day, home in New York, I got a job doing book reviews for a motion picture concern (now you know what was the matter with the movies!). More hard work that netted sometimes ten and sometimes as much as fifteen dollars a week. There I met a girl who was in exactly the same boat. We began to work together—until it got to be somewhat of a joke in the scenario office. But just about a week later we fooled 'em, slipped away and got married. That was one of the big ceremonies I had missed up until then, and I approached it with some fear and trembling. But I've since learned that the groom always does, so that the clicking of my knees was no new sound to fall upon the ears of that good man Percy Stickney Grant.

WE CUT the scenario game, and had a grand honeymoon on exactly fifteen dollars. Then we settled down in a little place in Brooklyn overlooking Buttermilk Channel. That was a year and a half ago now, and we've been there ever since, working like we've never worked before, and actually getting somewhere, we think. At least here I stand, talking away at a mile a minute to you folks. And some proud to be here too, I'll say!

ARE the wanderings over, you ask? Not by a long shot! Just as soon as my second mate signs on (I hear he's to be named after me, poor lad!) we'll be catting the anchor and coasting down to all those places that have rung so melodiously in our ears in the years gone by. Some day we shall send you a story from the Straits of Sunda, written under the shadow of Java Head—God willing, and the breeze holds out!

Happy landings to you-all till we meet again.—KENNETH MALCOLM MURRAY.

AS TO archers I'm not a competent judge, but the little chap mentioned below might well be developed into a pretty good football player when he gets his growth:

New Orleans.

I think our friend Powell is mistaken about shooting the heaviest bows of any archer in the country. I believe that distinction is due to a little boy friend of ours in Ponchatoula, La., only 16 years old.

Frank is a cute little fellow, with number 14 feet, a 38 inch waist, 46 inch chest, 6 feet 3 inches, and weighs 245 pounds. We expect him to shoot some real bows when he grows up, but just at present he uses a hundred and twenty pounder for target shooting. He has to use this little popper for hunting too, as we have not had a stave in stock to make him a hunting bow. We plan to make him one close to 200 pounds, because he is all chest and seems to have no limit to his strength.

We are all going 'gator hunting soon, and we will send you some photos if we have any luck.—ROUNSEVELLE.

THE Republican party was elected to office on a platform that declared definitely and specifically for a universal draft of wealth and labor as well as fighting men in case of war. So far the nearest they've come to keeping that solemn promise from being perjury is to talk about reducing the surtax on the bigger incomes.

If that's their way of making wealth play its just part in national defense, will they apply the same principle and method in case of another war and, instead of telling men of war age they must risk their health and lives at the front in the country's service, tell them that a safe refuge will be provided for them and that the women, children and old men will be sent to the front in their place?

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# Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

**1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters**
BERIAH BROWN, Cooperville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

**2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorising, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

**3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping**
HARRY E. RIESSBERG, 'Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the U. S., Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

**4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

**5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

**6. Islands Part 3 Cuba**
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

**7. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa**
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**8. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).**
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Boite No. 167, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

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PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

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FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

**11. ★ New Guinea**
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring.

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commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

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BRICE CONNER, L. B. 4, Quartzite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

13. Hawaiian Islands and China

F. J. HALTON, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

14. Japan

GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, combs.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo

CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan

GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

17. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters

CAPTAIN C. L. OLSEN, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

18. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan

GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amiraute, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

19. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria

ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

20. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo

CHARLES BEADLE, La Rosaraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

21. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand

CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 29 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

22. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East

R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

23. Africa Part 5 Morocco

GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

24. Africa Part 6 Tripoli

CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan

W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

27. Turkey

J. P. EDWARDS, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor

(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

30. Albania

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece

LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sport, travel, outdoor life.

33. Finland, Lapland and Russia.

ALEKO E. LILIUS, care *Adventure*. History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics outside of historical facts will not be discussed.

34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland

PROF. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

35. ✠ Great Britain

THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

36. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

37. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil

PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, Oakwood Ave., Harbor View Beach, South Norwalk, Conn. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

38. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

39. Central America

CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

40. Mexico Part 1 Northern

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1905 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California

C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 304, San Jose, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern

W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 1131 Columbia Rd., Washington, D. C. Federal Territory of Quinta Roo, Yucatan, Campeche. Travel, geography, business conditions, exploration, inhabitants, history and customs.

43. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Missi. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin

S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario

HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

45. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario

A. D. L. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

46. Canada Part 4 Manitoulin Island and English River District

T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

47. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta

(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

48. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin

REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

49. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec

JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting,

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✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

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fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

**50. Canada Part 8 Newfoundland**

C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Avenue, St. Johns, Newfoundland. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

**51. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island.**

FRED L. BOWDEN, 312 High Street, Newark, N. J. Lumbering, hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

**52. Alaska**

THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6720 Leland Way, Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

**53. Baffinland and Greenland**

VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

**54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.**

E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico**

H. F. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

**56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.**

FRANK MIDDLETON, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

**57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.**

FRED W. EGELSTON, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

**58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country**

R. T. NEWMAN, 1001 Park St., Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

**59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.**

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

**60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.**

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

**61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.**

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

**62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan**

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

**63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River**

GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section* 64.)

**64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes**

H. C. GARDNER, 1909 Stout St., Denver, Colo. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

**65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.**

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

**66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers**

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

**67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville**

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

**68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians**

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

**69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.**

HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**70. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine**

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

**71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine**

H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

**72. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.**

HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions; history.

**73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey**

FRANCIS H. BENT, Jr., Farmingdale, N. J. Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

**74. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland**

LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

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### A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

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### B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

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### C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

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### D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

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### E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

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### F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

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### G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

### H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2040 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

### I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLETCHER, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fletcher in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

### J.—Navy Matters

LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 245 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning naval and maritime affairs.

### K.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 1244½ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

### L.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

### M.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

### N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, 1001 Park St., Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

### O.—Herpetology

DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

### P.—Entomology

DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

## Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write LAURENCE JORDAN, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S. and its possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receivership in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State**, FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., Farmingdale, N. J.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National Rifle Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

**National parks**, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

### Hopi Dances

**A PAGAN rite that is hard to get to.**

*Request:*—"Will you kindly inform me whether there are any Indian dances which will take place in Arizona shortly?

I understand that the Indians of Arizona are similar to the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, and it is my desire, if I possibly can, to see one of the ceremonial dances.

Would you kindly give me any information that you may have in regard to this matter, and if any of these dances take place, could you give me the time and the best routes to get to them by automobile?

It is my intention, if possible, to take two young ladies with me who are tenderfeet for fair. Will you advise me, provided there are such things as these dances, in Arizona, whether I could take these two girls with me without too much discomfort to them?

Enclosed please find a self-addressed envelope and postage. Thanking you in advance for your kindness."—RICHARD C. BELUNZ, San Diego, Cal.

*Reply*, by Mr. Harriman:—The only ceremonial Indian dance of which I know the date or approximately the date, is the Hopi Snake dance, which comes in August, near the last of the month. The Hopi themselves never know the exact date until near the time, as it is fixed by the time when a shadow hits a certain point on the mesa. The priests watch and when a certain shadow touches this particular spot, then they know the dance must be held a certain number of days later.

This makes it vary from year to year, by a few days.

This dance is held either at Oraibi, Hotevilla or Walpi, though at times it occurs at Shumgopavi or Mishongnovi. It is the closing number of a nine-day ceremonial, which they believe brings rain. The snakes are caught and brought in after much mummery. The whole ceremony is a disgusting pagan rite, where men hold live snakes in their jaws and go dancing around the plaza. Then drink an emetic of strong potency and all stand in a row and vomit violently over a cliff. Bah!

Go to Holbrook, take the road to Keams Cañon, at Keams Cañon turn down to the west through Polacca, on to Wepo Wash, which you cross if you

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can, then continue on in a curve to the north to Toreva, swing to the northwest and around in a big curve to Oraibi Wash, which is a quicksand like Wepo Wash when it has rained, cross that and go on to lower Oraibi, drive up to top of Mesa to Old Oraibi. Hotevilla is at the other end of the same mesa, seven miles farther on.

Get directions at Holbrook as to which of five villages will have the dance this year. See the dance and start back on the road to Tolchaco and on from there to Flagstaff. If you get mired in either Wepo Wash or Oraibi Wash, remember that hundreds of others have done the same thing. One year my friend Charles E. Major saw thirteen cars stuck in Wepo and one hundred and ten waiting on shore for their turns.

There will be no comforts or accommodations for the girls. They will have to rough it as men do; sit up all night in the car, probably.

***The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.***

### Ceylon

"The Blessed Isle."

*Request:*—"Will you kindly tell me something of Colombo and the island of Ceylon?

1. Is the climate healthful in Colombo?
2. What is the American population?
3 Can you give me some idea of the cost of living—what income would one need to live comfortably there?
4. Could I rent a furnished house there?
5. Are tropical fevers prevalent?
6. Can you tell me the names of several of the best hotels there and rates?

I do hope that I have not asked too many questions, but I am most anxious to know about Ceylon.

I should be glad to read any books you might suggest on this subject; also I shall appreciate any other information you think might be of interest.

If this letter is published please do not print my name in full."—Miss ——.

*Reply*, by Capt. Dingle:—If you ever settle in Ceylon you will never want to see a steamer on sailing day again. That, to my mind, is the Blessed Isle.

I cannot answer all of your queries in entirely definite form, since prices all over the world are still unsettled; but you will find my answers very close to facts.

The climate is healthful and wholesome; but of course is rather hot, in Colombo, being only some five degrees north of the Equator. But there are delicious settlements on the slopes of the rising interior. The actual number of Americans I am unable to state. It is small, however. British predominate of the whites; and they are excellent people.

Cost of living is difficult to estimate, knowing nothing of number of persons taking a house, or style of living. But a fair style of housekeeping can be maintained for about three hundred rupees monthly. (About $150.00 roughly.)

Furnished bungalows can be secured through agents.

Tropical fevers are not at all prevalent.

Good Hotels are GALLE FACE, rates around 20 rupees per day. GRANDE HOTEL, 14 to 25 rupees daily. BRISTOL at 10 rupees, all including meals. Steamer fare from New York, first class, $550.00 and upward. Books on Ceylon, Brentano, New York, will get them on request: "Two Happy Years in Ceylon," by Constance Gordon Cumming; "The Book of Ceylon," by H. W. Cave. The first published in Edinburgh, the second in London. Luck to you!

### Wages On the Great Lakes

THE scale for inland sailors is fixed in the spring of each year.

*Request:*—"Will you inform me as to what wages sailors receive on the Great Lakes vessels, what were the wages paid last season and what are they going to be this season?

Please state what the highest and lowest wages received are in each department of a lake vessel. If you can give me this information without referring me to the carriers or companies operating on the lakes I will deem it a very great favor."— ——, Billings, Mont.

*Reply*, by Mr. Gardner:—In regard to your query, the wages paid on Great Lakes vessels last year were as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Boatswain | $120.00 |
| Able Seamen, Wheelsmen, Watchmen, Firemen and Oilers | 105.00 |
| Ordinary Seamen | 77.00 |
| Porters | 75.00 |
| Coal Passers | 72.00 |

This is the wages per month and includes room and board. The wage scale for this year or any other year as a rule is not out until sometime in May but I do not look for any change this year.

Should you be thinking of doing a little sailing this season, I have it from a very reliable source that there will be an early start made this year, boats are fitting out now and will be leaving for up lakes about the 20th of April.

### Central America

TRAVELING through it with a land-gas machine presents certain problems.

*Request:*—Will you kindly give me some information regarding Central America, my friend and I are planning on traveling through from Mexico City to the Panama Canal on a motorcycle with sidecar, can we make it?

Can we obtain employment with the United Fruit Company, or is there some other job that an American can do to meet expenses, we are traveling for pleasure but if we can strike a place where there is a possible chance of making good money we will stay there?"—C. T. Henry, Portsmouth, O.

*Reply*, by Mr. Emerson:—From personal observations in Central America, I do not believe it would be advisable to attempt to travel by any "land-gas" machine in or on the surface of the countries you name in letter.

There has been a movement in the United States,

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headed by Colonel Bascom Cameron of Raleigh, North Carolina, to continue the Bankhead Highway into Mexico, but so far funds have not been provided and may not be available for years yet, for constructing the section between the United States border and Mexico City.

With gasoline at eighty-five cents in Honduras (at present writing), and about ninety per cent. of the roads hard to get over even on mule back, you would be on a "hard-luck" trip most of the time.

Read "Gypsying Through Central America," by Eugene Cunningham. Pub. by E. P. Dutton and Company, New York (681 Fifth Ave.). 1922.

Read "Tramping Through Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras," by Harry A. Franck. Pub. by The Century Co., New York City. 1917.

The conditions for traveling have remained about the same, except in a very few instances.

I would advise you to leave your machine in Portsmouth, Ohio, until you had written to the United Fruit Co., 131 State St., Boston, Mass. and got a job with them, starting from New Orleans, on one of their twenty-two Fruit and Passenger steamers plying between the U. S. A. and Caribbean ports. This Fruit Co. employs an army of men, and you probably could fill some job with them either on a banana plantation, or at one of their Sugar Centrals or on some of their many miles of railroad in Central America.

If you send them two letters of recommendation from some local firms, and give a brief history of yourself, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for reply, and for return of your letters of recommendation, then you have done your part as a starter. Many young men have started with that Company, and are with them yet; they must like it or they would not remain.

### Vikings

**WHERE did they land in America?**

*Request:*—"This inquiry may not come under your jurisdiction—if not, just don't take the trouble to acknowledge this letter at all. I appreciate how much of your time this question-answering must take, and feel we should all make it as easy for the "Ask Adventure" men as we can.

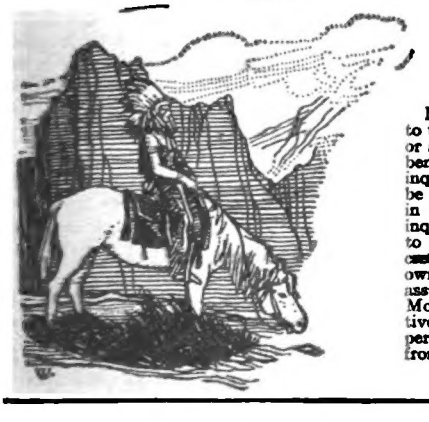
1. Were the Viking's supposed to have visited Newfoundland or other territory you cover? If so, where?

2. Please name all the reference books on this subject that I should find in the N. Y. libraries."—A. R. Forbush, N. Y. City.

*Reply*, by Mr. Belford:—The Vikings were supposed to have landed on the coast of Newfoundland and to have gone as far south as Massachusetts. We get this information principally from the old Norse Sagars telling of the exploits of these old warriors.

I am answering this away from my books so am afraid the answer will be a bit sketchy. They came from Greenland down the Labrador coast along the western coast of New foundland, the exact spot of their landing and temporary settlement is not known, but probably would be around the present city of St. John. From there they drifted farther south the old Sagas relate some of their wars with the Indians. For a time a round tower on the American coast was supposed to have been of Viking origin but believe that is down now.

As to books anything you can find on the early Norse literature will contain some reference to these, but the data is very small though the fact is well established.



# LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

TANNER, DICK. A native of Cork City, Ireland. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address M. Tanner, care of *Adventure*.

BRALEY, RALPH. Please write or come home. I still love you and always will. Address Mrs. Ruby Braley, 1532 Penn St., Kansas City, Mo.

MALLOTT, WILLARD E. Was discharged from the army at Fort Monroe, Virginia in 1923, and went to Houston, Texas. Last heard from he was in Oakdale, Iowa. Any information will be appreciated by his old pal.—Address Ramey Bryant, 1st Avia. G, Service Squad. Quantico, Va.

BAKER, RAY A. Formerly of Pine Bluff. Please let me know where you are so that I may write you.—Address Jean C., care of *Adventure*.

REEVES, REGINALD FLOYD. Six feet tall, weight about 175 lbs., light brown wavy hair, large blue eyes, very fair complexion, age 34 years. Has slight scar across one eyebrow, also a scar across one knee. Last heard from in Willard, New York. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address Mrs. Chas. S. Reeves, 1219 Genesee St., Buffalo, New York.

LOCKE, CHARLES F. Have moved from 245 W. 111th St. Please write me as soon as you see this.—Address John Robert Locke, 302 W. 112th St., N. Y. C.

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ANDERSON, John Howie; Augustine, Miss Elizabeth; Bloomenthal, James; Boggs, Jack J.; Bolan, Thomas; Briggs, Charles Harvey; Donnelly, John; Farren, Jack; Fitzgerald, Lewis C.; Gordon, J. H.; Greene, James William; Gillespie, James, John, and Myles; Hale, Jim; Holmes, Perley (Pus); Lederer, Abe; Lemley, Pop; Perrett or Perett, Ferdinand; Richmond, Earl; Ryan, Ernest W.; Sprague, W. A.; Stapley, James; Williams, E.; Williams, Ernest.

MISCELLANEOUS—Bud; Men of the 22nd U. S. Infantry Co. G. who served in Alaska and Texas.

WOOLLWEEVER, ADOLPH RICHARD AND BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (brothers). Last heard from about 20 years ago at Sabula, Iowa, when we were separated by the death of our parents, whose names were John and Elizabeth Woollweever. Any information will be appreciated by their half-brother.—Address JOHN H. BURDEN, 768 S. Osceola, St. Paul, Minn.

**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

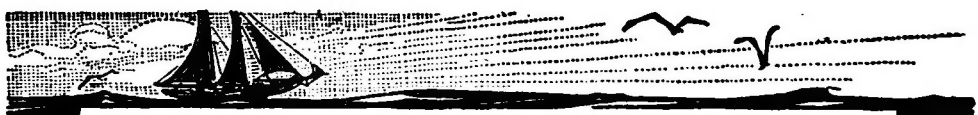
FLYNN, MRS. ELLA BROOKER. Missing since May 20, 1925 from Buffalo, New York. Age 24 years, height five feet five inches, dark brown hair, blue eyes. Wore blue serge suit, black hat and tan shoes. May have gone to Canada. Any information will be appreciated by her husband.—Address WM. J. FLYNN, care of Lake Carriers Association, Cleveland, Ohio.

PRINCE, PHILIP J. (Jack). Last heard from in summer of 1920. He was then in Hoople, North Dakota. Previous to that he had been in Minot, N. D. He may have gone to Sask, Canada. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address H. A. PRINCE, 124 Brackett St., Portland, Maine.

**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

DAVIS, ANDREW LESTER (also known as A. L. Whitehouse). Last heard of at Clairmont, Alberta, Canada in 1923, in company with Art. Whitehouse. Age 28 years, blue eyes, black hair, about six feet tall. His mother died a year ago and his folks are anxious to hear from him. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address PEARL COUNTRYMAN MENZIE, Gen. Del., Troy, Montana.

WOULD like very much to hear from any member of the old 21st Balloon Co. from the date of 1919 to 1922.—Address W. F. BROWNE, 741 Stamford Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.



# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## OCTOBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the new serial and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

**NO LAW** — ***Barry Scobee***
He thought he'd be a free man in Mexico.

**RODOMONT Conclusion** — ***H. Bedford-Jones***
The lugger waited in the offing.

**HOME FROM THE WARS** — ***James Parker Long***
The bagpipes called him over the hill.

**THE REVENGE OF DON EMILIO** — ***Thomas Topham***
The *caballero* cared nothing for pain.

**THE SLAT WAGON** — ***Leonard H. Nason***
Even soldiers can lose their patience.

**THE KNELL OF THE HORN** — ***Captain Dingle***
Under the sea the old warriors rested.

**STILL FARTHER AHEAD**

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Harold Lamb, Georges Surdez, William P. Barron, George E. Holt, T. S. Stribling, Sidney Herschel Small, W. C. Tuttle, John Murray Reynolds and Robert Simpson; short stories by Alan LeMay, Ralph R. Perry, Leslie McFarlane, Barry Scobee, L. Paul, Captain Dingle, E. S. Pladwell, Charles Victor Fischer, Bill Adams, Charles Tenney Jackson, Wilkeson O'Connell and others; stories of treasure hunters in Haiti, man hunters in Africa, Don Cossacks on the Russian steppes, desert riders in Morocco, beachcombers in Japan, voodoo worshipers in the West Indies, sagebrush sheriffs in the Southwest, sailors off Cape Horn, cowboys on the Western ranges, white men on the Fever Coast, feudists in the Appalachains, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

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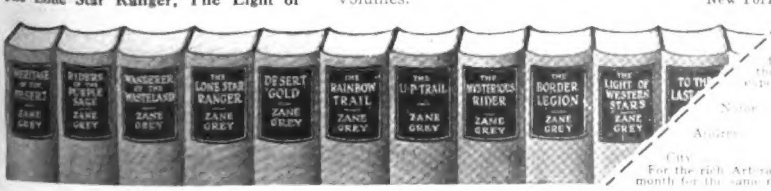


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Shave *every* day—be comfortable

# COLGATE'S

## for better shaving

YESTERDAY—

What a difference a few years make in fashions! How absurd some of them seem to be, when we look backward!

Would we be willing to adopt the grotesque styles to which our grandfathers submitted? It would take a constitutional amendment, at least, to drive us to such things.

Perhaps the purpose of whiskers that reached from ear to ear, and skirts that left no room for doubt was to eliminate difficulty in telling the sexes apart.

If so, its effectiveness can hardly be questioned, but here a disturbing thought intrudes. Since women have gone in for knickies and bobs it is conceivable that whiskers may in time be needed again to show that men are men.

The horror of such a possibility becomes evident when we see how the well-groomed man of today would look with such facial fol-de-rols as were fashionable sixty years ago.

The daily shave, now a business as well as a social requirement, is easy when Colgate's Rapid-Shave Cream is used for making lather.

TODAY—

Colgate's Rapid-Shave Cream is preferred by men who appreciate shaving comfort.

It emulsifies the oily coating upon each hair of the beard, permitting moisture to penetrate and soften it *at the base*, where the razor's work is done.

You will realize as soon as you try it that Colgate's gives a better shave. It leaves the face soothed and velvety.

Let us send you a trial tube of this marvelous cream—enough for 12 better shaves than you have ever had. Fill out and mail attached coupon, with 4c.

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